

# INTERPRETING UNESCO AND ICOM INTANGIBLE HERITAGE CONVENTIONS JAPANESE COLLECTIONS IN SWEDEN



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### **Interpreting UNESCO and ICOM intangible heritage conventions: Japanese collections in Sweden**

#### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis was to examine and analyze how Röhsska museum in Gothenburg and the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm worked according to the UNESCO Convention (2003) and ICOM guidelines in relation to the preservation and display of their Japanese collections intangible cultural heritage.

By looking at Japanese objects as symbols that are part of a wider context and whose culture has a complex system of different classifications that only can be understood through social interactions, Geertz's theory "*Thick Description*" has been particularly useful.

This is a comparative study drawing on literature, observation and interviews with key curators. Through their knowledge and the institutions practice of Japanese collections and exhibitions, this thesis critically examined how these two museums understood and implemented the UNESCO Convention and ICOMs guidelines.

Sweden ratified the UNESCO Convention in 2011, but this thesis shows that in practice this has not worked well. It concludes by arguing that methods should be developed that could function as a foundation for care plans and decisions regarding safeguarding of museum collections intangible cultural heritage in the future.

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## Foreword

I owe many thanks and would like to start by thanking my informants for their invaluable contributions and my supervisor Dr. Diana Walters for always giving me great feedback and input throughout this master thesis. Lastly I would like to give sincere thanks to my family, without their support and love this master thesis would never have been completed.

On the front page of this thesis is a picture of the Japanese Teahouse, Zui- Ki- Tei, which is located at Norra Djurgården at the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm.





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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis critically examines how Röhsska museum in Gothenburg and the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm worked with their Japanese collections and exhibitions intangible cultural heritage, and assesses to what extent they did this in adherence with the UNESCO Convention for “*Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*” (2003) and ICOMs “*Curricula Guidelines for Museums Professional Development*”.

## 1.2 Disposition

In the introduction chapter I introduce a background to the significance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage for museums, a problem description, research aim and objectives, a presentation of my theoretical framework, method, material and previous research.

In chapter two I examine the UNESCO Convention for “*Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*” (2003) to broaden my understanding of how the convention operates. In this chapter I also explore the conventions five key domains and address their significance for my research questions so I in a more analytical way can analyze my illustrated examples, Röhsska museum in Gothenburg and the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm.

In chapter three I explore more about ICOM and their position in the safeguarding of museum collections intangible cultural heritage. I also examine ICOMs “*Curricula Guidelines for Museums Professional Development*”.

This chapter creates a framework for how and if my illustrated examples followed the guidelines and how consistently.

In chapter four key aspects of Japanese art history and symbolism are presented, I explore the intangible qualities of Japanese objects within western museum collection through analyzing literature associated with the main belief system in Japanese cultural tradition. I also assess the impact and importance that Japanese religions have had on Japanese symbolism and artistic expressions as well as Japanese culture.

Chapter two through four is concluded with shorter analysis that builds the foundation of my conclusions.

In chapter five I present the results of my illustrated examples and analyze how they have worked with the UNESCO Convention (2003) and ICOM guidelines when it comes to the preservation of their three exhibition parts Nô masks, Metal arts and Tea ceremony.

In chapter six I present my conclusions and relate to my objectives.

### Acronyms

The following acronyms are used in this study

UNESCO- United Nation Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

UNESCO Convention (2003) -UNESCO Convention for *Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003)

ICOM- International Council of Museums

ICOM guidelines- ICOMs *Curricula Guidelines for Museums Professional Development*

ICH- Intangible Cultural Heritage

ICTOP- International Committee for the Training of Personnel

## 1.2 A background to the significance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage for museums

In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approved the convention for "*Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*" (2003) which came into force in 2006 and has been ratified by 130 states (as of February 2015)<sup>1</sup>. This convention identified five key areas: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) and traditional craftsmanship<sup>2</sup>. Article 14 of the UNESCO Convention (2003) specifies how each convention state should strive to promote ICH and how to increase awareness of this through training and other methods to transfer knowledge, information and research methods in preservation<sup>3</sup>. According to UNESCO is the definition of intangible cultural heritage:

The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representation, expressions, knowledge, skills- as well as the instruments, objects and cultural spaces associated therewith- that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development<sup>4</sup>

Since the convention was adopted, there has been considerable discussion in the museum world about what role museums should have. The International Council of Museums (ICOM), a division of UNESCO has been a strong advocate of intangible cultural heritage. In a 2003 piece in the *ICOM News* Dr. Amar Galla a leading expert on museums, sustainable heritage development and poverty alleviation through culture<sup>5</sup> explained the following:

ICOM strongly supports UNESCO's efforts towards the safeguarding and promotion of intangible heritage, and stresses the importance of inputs from professional bodies like ICOM ... The UNESCO Convention is a significant first step in renewing our relationship to cultural heritage, by promoting integrated approaches to tangible and intangible heritage<sup>6</sup>.

In 2005 ICOM created the "*ICOM Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development*" that encouraged museums to be places that took responsibility for safeguarding and transmitting knowledge of intangible cultural heritage. This set in motion changes that significantly affected the roles and the routines of traditional museum institutions. ICOM's initiatives of 2005 required museum personnel to gather knowledge, skills and attitudes as part of staff training and professional development. These programs were obliged to review both content and methods in how to work with safeguarding of their collections ICH in museums<sup>7</sup>. Eilean Hooper- Greenhill, a former Professor of museum studies at Leicester University argued this trend was the beginning of a new museum paradigm that she called the "post-museum". Hooper- Greenhill wrote that post-museums would "retain some of the characteristics of its parents, but it will re-shape them to its own ends<sup>8</sup>". Regarding the objects and the collections' place in museums, she argued that post-museums would put more emphasis on use rather than on collecting and that would lead to intangible cultural heritage receiving

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<sup>1</sup> Unesco.org

<sup>2</sup> Unesco.org

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO Convention (2003) Article 14

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Convention (2003) Article 2

<sup>5</sup> <http://icom.org.au/>

<sup>6</sup> Galla, quoted in C. Kreps 2009:201

<sup>7</sup> <http://ictop.org/>

<sup>8</sup> Hooper- Greenhill 2000:152

more attention<sup>9</sup>. In post-museums the assigned curatorial authority would be shared between the museum, community members and other stakeholders whose voices and perspectives would contribute to the production of knowledge and culture in the museum through partnerships that celebrated diversity. Hooper-Greenhill stressed that knowledge was no longer uniform or monolithic, but on the contrary became more fragmented and multi-vocal<sup>10</sup>.

### 1.2.1 Problem description

The need and desire to create objects has existed as long as human beings. Objects are an important aspect of our creation of meaning, and thanks to their solid form, abstract concepts can be concrete such as different cultural heritage such as the Buddhist monuments in the Horyo-ji area in Japan<sup>11</sup>. Besides their function the objects can convey intellectual meanings and act as powerful metaphors. These objects are physical representations of complex beliefs and thoughts through which we understand the physical world. Once objects end up in the museum there is a danger that their original meaning gets lost, yet they still carry significance for different groups of people, notably source communities. Museums today have become an accepted place to store and preserve objects that have helped us to understand other conceptions of life than our own. The museums' function and purpose is not only to store these items but it is also the place people go and visit to consume the knowledge of these objects. However, sometimes the museological institution lacks knowledge about the objects, for instance intellectual, emotional, cultural, aesthetic and votive significance and often knows more about physical construction. Safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage needs to take into account for a more holistic approach and therefore different knowledge needs to be considered, including that from source communities.

### 1.2.2 Research aim and research intents

This dissertation examines the ways in which Röhsska Museum in Gothenburg and the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm work according to the "*ICOM Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development*" and the Convention of "*Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*" (2003), and to what extent these are understood and implemented when it comes to the preservation and display of their Japanese collections' intangible cultural heritage.

The main research intents are:

- \* to examine the knowledge and awareness of the UNESCOs Convention of Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) in Röhsska museum and the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm and assess how consistent their practice is with the guidelines of ICOM and the Convention.
- \* to assess the extent the intangible values from the conventions' five key areas are taken into account in two museums and why
- \* to explore the intangible qualities of Japanese objects within western museum collections through critically analyzing literature associated with main belief system in Japanese cultural traditions
- \* to assess the level of knowledge about the Japanese objects the selected museums have chosen to exhibit, through analyzing archives, databases, exhibition and to identify if there are personnel with particular knowledge of Japanese cultural heritage and assess their knowledge and expertise
- \* to examine if the museums have any educational programs/ collaborations with other museums bodies in Japan
- \* to assess if there is a need to develop methods to better and more effectively work with preservation of the Japanese intangible cultural heritage in the selected museums and suggest further areas of work

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.152

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.153

<sup>11</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/660>

### 1.2.3 Limitations

To investigate how every museum works in relation to ICOMs guidelines and the UNESCO Convention of "*Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*" (2003) would be too broad and therefore the study focused on two museums, which both are situated in Sweden. I have chosen museums with different approaches to this subject, the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm and Röhsska Museum in Gothenburg, Sweden's only museum of fashion, design and crafts. I am focusing on their Japanese collection and exhibitions and particularly three specific aspects of display.

Japan as a country and culture have always fascinated me, and especially the intangible cultural heritage which is very multifaceted and intriguing. The reason why I have chosen these two museums is that they both have beautiful Japanese collections on display. In 2014 I undertook an internship at Röhsska museums and also two shorter field studies at the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm both in connection to their Japanese exhibitions. This formed the basis of my enquiry.

## 1.3 Theoretical framework

### Symbolism, cultural anthropology and ethnography

According to Mathieu in his book "*the symbolist generation*" symbolism is a difficult term to define, but that substantially it means the practice of representing objects through symbols. For a complete understanding of the word symbolism it is necessary to go back to its Greek roots, to *symbolon* which means "an identifying sign". A symbol was a token which was broken in half between two friends or confederates who kept their halves and gave them to their children so that when the time came the owners were able to re-establish a connection between their families by putting the two halves back together again. The word symbol or symbolism contains the basic idea of a message; a thing that communicates<sup>12</sup>. What symbolic authors and artists/designers all had in common was that they used words, forms and colours to communicate personal messages of spiritual, religious and of moral characters to their readers or viewers. It is possible to find the use of symbols in every civilization since the dawn of time. Symbols are objects, figures and colours that stand for feelings that cannot be perceived physically. Experts within interpretation of symbols are striving to penetrate their deepest, elementary levels of meanings, primarily by study civilizations, and religions of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Far East among others<sup>13</sup>.

Culture is a complex system of different classifications of symbols that are shared in different societies and understood only through social interactions. Since the symbols form a web of meaning for individuals in each culture the symbols lose their meanings when divorced from their original context and relationship with other symbols. To study symbolism it is necessary to examine and compare cultural contexts. This is the very function of cultural anthropology, and to understand symbolism as the basis of a culture-, it is necessary to explore and analyze their symbolical past<sup>14</sup>. Mary LeCron Foster was an anthropological linguist who wrote that there couldn't be a culture without symbolism<sup>15</sup>. She wrote:

Every symbol participates in a web of significances that we call culture. In other words, any symbol *resonates* with meaning. The meaning of a symbol is *not* a 'thing', and it can only be grasped inductively by observation of many instances of the social uses of that symbol, or similar symbols. It is only by observation praxis that ethnologists can discover cultural symbolic constructs, hence culture itself. Culture is not itself formed of symbols, but of meaning that lies behind and unites symbols. This meaning only exists in the minds of participants in culture, but it is acted out through the manipulation of symbols, which objectify meaning<sup>16</sup>.

LeCron Foster believed that symbolism originated and developed in human culture due to a growing appreciation and social use of abstract metaphors between objects and events separated in time and

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<sup>12</sup> Mathieu 1990:8-9

<sup>13</sup> Mathieu 1990:9

<sup>14</sup> LeCron Foster 1994: 367

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.366

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.366

space<sup>17</sup>. In "*Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*" (1973) Geertz sees culture in semiotic terms, as a kind of public document in which people express themselves through various signs and symbols which have their cultural significance prescribed. For Geertz, culture is far from being an abstract psychological construction; he believes that cultures are systems of symbolic meanings and that this symbolic meaning is understood from the process of social interactions. According to Geertz culture, on the contrary, embodies in the person who is acting in and out in a certain context, and culture is revealed in a person's actions and his interpretation of their meaning. He looks at anthropology as an interpreter in the quest for relevance and meaning. One way to try to approach symbolism is by using Geertz's theory "*thick description*" which specifies details, conceptual structures and meanings. Geertz argues that an ethnographer's task is the same thing as someone that belongs to a certain culture and that is to have a deep-rooted understanding of semiotics (symbols and meanings) of a culture; the very notion of "*thick description*". "*Thick description*" is for him an imperative method that takes into account the structure and characters of cultures' semiotic formations, and he makes a strong distinction between "*thick description*" and "*thin description*" which is a transparent description of a culture that does not include the hermeneutic interpretations which "*thick description*" requires.

### 1.3.1 Japanese Symbolism

Symbolic motifs have long played an important role in Japanese culture and art. Among the most influential original symbols were of religious characters introduced by or through China. It was mainly Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism that in powerful ways came to affect Japanese expressions. For example Taoism inspired motifs of supernatural powers and long lives while Buddhism, which has been the most influential religion when it comes to design such as Zen gardens, developed motifs associated with esoteric Buddhist sects. Confucians values are evident in the motifs of Chinese plant groups that include pine, plum and bamboo<sup>18</sup>. Throughout the centuries different Japanese expressions have become large and varied which could be due to the fact that Japan for a long time was an isolated island. Japanese culture has a great respect for past custom and experiences. Although Japanese symbolism is large and varied, one can identify images that are more common. Among the more popular motifs are cherry blossom, bamboo, pine, peonies and the crane.

There are certain Japanese words that cannot be translated into English, for example "*katachi*". The word is usually translated to "form" but it has a wider meaning. *Katachi*'s function is to bring a functional as well as a spiritual harmony<sup>19</sup>. The Buddhist influence still leaves traces in the Japanese daily life such as household, utensils and Zen ethics of the tea ceremony. Every shape and form must be simple but of the highest perfection, the idea being that the elegant feature reveals the chastity and purity of the objects. The high peak of Japanese art expression was during the Edo period (second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century). The refinement and cultivation during this period can be found in the sword guard (*tsukas*) and the girdle knots (*netsukes*) and the manufacture of swords (*katana*). The ornaments that can be seen in *tsukas* which later became very coveted by collectors both in and outside of Japan are an art form of the highest quality<sup>20</sup>.

Japan has a distinctive culture that feels both modern and familiar, but which in many respects is still regarded as something unfamiliar according to Western' interpretation structures. The modern western image of the Orient was formed by writings from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, expressing the Western man's perspective. Edward Said's theory "*Orientalism*" (1978) laid the foundation of Western approach to the Orient as something exotic and alien. This view can be seen even today and is made visible in various museum contexts when creating exhibits that represent, for the West, foreign cultures such as Asian countries. In his book "*Orientalism*" Said writes that the Orient serves as a counterpart to Europe, it was everything that the West wasn't<sup>21</sup>. The Orient was, according to Said, a platonic essence that must be explored, understood and exposed which stands in a strong contrast to Europe.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.368

<sup>18</sup> Gunther 2003:11–12

<sup>19</sup> Smeets 1975:43

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.43–44

<sup>21</sup> Minear, Richard H. 1980:507

The European is a known quantity that is both comfortable and familiar, while the Orient is its exact opposite. Orientalism marks the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, us) and the strange (the Orient, East, them). The European stands for the rational, virtuous, mature and normal while the Orient is irrational, depraved, childish and strange<sup>22</sup>. This view of the Orient has helped to define the Western world by acting as their direct opposite. In "*Japan as Other: Orientalism and Cultural Conflict*," Rosen argued that Orientalism has become the concept used to highlight the difference between 'us and them', and stressed that the intercultural communication between Japan and the West will continue to be a problem as long as stereotypes are held and Europe continues to look at other cultures as something alien. By removing the barrier between East and West, Rosen stressed that our ability to understand and communicate with other cultures will improve. He questioned a lot of stereotypes that Westerners have put on Japan, which is seen as a monolithic culture that is too authoritarian, hierarchical and patriarchal. An interpretative tool that can assist to better understand the Japanese culture is therefore the use of symbolism.

By looking at Japanese objects as symbols that are part of a wider context and whose culture has a complex system of different classifications that only can be understood through social interactions, I have drawn on Geertz's theory "*Thick Description*" described above. Where Geertz's "*Thick Description*" requires field studies in the objects' originating manufacturing countries, I will put the focus on museums' relationships, collaborations and research, and other gathered data for the interpretation of the Japanese objects. Considering anthropology association with the study of human cultural diversity and the associated expertise in ethnographical methods I feel that these theoretical approaches support the enquiries in this thesis with how to interpret and understand the symbolical meanings of the Japanese collection.

I have chosen three similar exhibition parts (Tea ceremony, metal art and nô mask) in both Röhsska and in the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm to assess the level of knowledge about these exhibited objects through analyzing archives, databases and exhibition. I have also explored if there was any educational activity related to these exhibitions or personnel with knowledge of Japanese cultural heritage and the extent of their knowledge. This was to undertake a comparative approach.

## 1.4 Methods and materials

This is a comparative study on how Röhsska and the Ethnographic museum applied the UNESCO conventions and ICOM guidelines in their work with their Japanese collections ICH. The literature review forms the theoretical basis of this study and data is derived from interviews with curators at Röhsska, the Ethnographic Museum and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities.

Examining and critically analyzing literature about the safeguarding of ICH in museums, Japanese collections, Japanese art history, Japanese religions, interpretations and symbolism have been the foundation of this thesis. I have also used anthologies with several different authors that are or have been involved with working with ICH in museums, in matters affecting how they worked with the changes in postmodernist museums. The preservation of ICH has been of a growing importance and focus in museums around the world. A few such anthologies are "*Making Japanese Heritage*" (Brumann& Cox, 2009), "*Intangible heritage*" (Smith& Akagawa, 2009), and "*Companion encyclopedia of anthropology*" (Ingold, 1994).

I have also researched two illustrated examples that form the basis for the comparative section of this thesis.

I have selected two museums with different approaches, using three similar aspects of display. I have undertaken interviews with staff in the Ethnographic museum and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, both of these museums are included in the same authority and share curators<sup>23</sup>. I have also undertaken an interview with the exhibition curator at Röhsska Museum regarding their- Japan

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<sup>22</sup> Minear, Richard H. 1980:507

<sup>23</sup> Both of these museums are situated in Stockholm



exhibition which was taken down in the summer of 2014. My material consisted of 3 semi- structured, recorded interviews. When conducting the interviews I used a questionnaire which I handed out to my informants before the interviewed started, this increased the likelihood that all topics I aimed to research would be covered<sup>24</sup>. The simple structured questionnaires functioned as a means for quantitative interviews<sup>25</sup> and according to McCracken<sup>26</sup> the use of a questionnaire is sometimes regarded as an important matter in a qualitative research interview. The questionnaire protects the larger structure and objectives of the interview so that the interviewer can attend to the task at hand<sup>27</sup>. One important thing to have in mind with the data provided from the interviews is that interviews are social encounters and my informants might try to answer my questions without understanding what I am after<sup>28</sup>. Another disadvantage is that it takes a lot of skill to administer a questionnaire without subtly telling the informants how they should answer the questions<sup>29</sup>. Some advantages of face- to face interviews is that if an informant doesn't understand a question in a personal interview, I can provide further explanation, I can also probe for more complete data if I sense that my informant is not answering fully<sup>30</sup>. My interviews lasted between 1 to 3 hours.

I have undertaken a total of two weeks field study at the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm where I documented the exhibition sections; tea ceremony, metal arts and nô masks. I examined how the Ethnographic Museum had presented the chosen exhibition parts in terms of their database "*Carlotta*"<sup>31</sup>, and also through pictures. I have previously done an internship at Röhsska Museum during March to May 2014, where I more thoroughly documented the Japanese exhibition before they dismantled it. I have also photographically documented Röhsska Museum's Japanese exhibition sections, the tea ceremony, metal arts and nô masks. I analyzed the information from Röhsska museum's database "*MuseumPlus*" to compare that information with the catalogue cards and track any differences. Museum Plus is a database that Röhsska Museum uses to record and document their collections and objects. All pictures presented in this thesis were taken by the author.

I have chosen to use a mixed methods approach because collecting diverse types of data best provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative data alone<sup>32</sup>. My informants are not chosen to represent some part of the larger world, but as McCracken states, offer an opportunity to get a glimpse of the complicated character, organization and logic of culture<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Dewalt& Dewalt 2011:139

<sup>25</sup> See appendix X

<sup>26</sup> McCracken 1988:24

<sup>27</sup> McCracken 2014:25

<sup>28</sup> Russel 2006:246

<sup>29</sup> Russel 2006:257

<sup>30</sup> Russel 2006:256

<sup>31</sup> Carlotta is a database system for museum collections and is an information system developed for museum and their museum collection. Carlotta is owned by the National Museum of World Culture comprising four museums in Stockholm and Gothenburg; the Ethnographic museum, the Museum of World Culture, East Asian Museum and Mediterranean Museum. There are also several other museums in Sweden that uses this system. The basic idea of Carlotta is to provide a flexible system that can be used and adapted to all kinds of museum collections.

<sup>32</sup> Creswell 2014

<sup>33</sup> McCracken 1988:17

## 1.5 Previous research

A book that deals with ICH in a profound way is "*Intangible Heritage*"<sup>34</sup> an anthology from 2009 edited by Smith, Laura Jane & Akagawa, Natsuko. The book presents an important cross section of ideas and practices in relation to ICH. The volume has gathered authors from different parts of the world to document and analyze developments and implications of the Convention for Safeguarding of ICH (2003). This book identifies the principles, philosophy and assumptions of the Convention and discusses the implications these may have. The authors discuss the development of leadership and conservation practice and examine the dominant ideas about the role and purpose of cultural heritage in contemporary society. Some case studies document and present political aspects of ICH while other chapters explore the more theoretical implications regarding definitions of heritage science. This anthology is relevant since it shows how different museums try to work with the Convention and adopt several methods in their endeavors.

The book "*Making Japanese Heritage*" 2010 is also an anthology<sup>35</sup>. This book looks at the formation of Japanese cultural heritage. The book has detailed ethnographic and historical case studies that analyze not only the social and economic but also the global dimension of cultural heritage. This book helps to show how the claim of heritage status in Japan affects different material qualities of an object, place or person that is based on age, originality and use. The various case studies in the book address everything from geishas, nô masks, tea ceremonies to urban architecture. One chapter was especially relevant to my enquiry and was written by Rachel Payne "*Nô masks in stage and in museums, approaches to the contextualization and conservation of the Pitt Rivers Museum nô mask collection*". Payne illustrates how the Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford, UK, originally chose to represent the nô masks without any regard to their intangible value as a part of their country's cultural heritage but as a commodity. More recently the Pitt Rivers Museums re-contextualized the nô masks by, for example provide extra contextual information on the museum's website which can provide visitors with access to a detailed account of a wide range of theatrical, historic and artistic aspects<sup>36</sup>. This is interesting since my research examines in what way the museums have taken into regard the Convention of safeguarding of ICH when created their nô mask exhibition section. Paynes work has influenced my comparative study in how nô masks, tea utensils and metal art can be viewed in different sectors as historical relics, decorative art and in some cases also as performance tools. Japanese heritage is not a singular concept but communicates a range of different meanings.

Another very interesting anthology that came out in 1991 and still is highly relevant is "*Exhibiting culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*",<sup>37</sup> which contains 22 essays that address issues of how schools, curators and museum directors think about museum exhibitions regarding culturally significant artifacts and performances, amongst others. I would like to highlight especially an essay that has a similar enquiry as mine; Masao Yamaguchi's essay "*The Poetics of the Exhibition in Japanese Culture*". Yamaguchi writes about the Japanese attitude to exhibitions and shows that objects in Japan are not openly defined as simple elements in the physical world. The Japanese word for object is *mono* which in the word's initial meaning meant "spirit like". There is a possible relation to the Japanese technic of *mitate* which can be translated as "the art of quoting" where, for example the objects are allowed to stand for another meaning, place and time. In the Japanese exhibitions the objects are not appreciated for their design as you first might think when the items are exhibited, but for the degree the objects can reproduce a mythical world. This means that the objects are seen as something secondary while the primary in Japan is the objects intangible form.

Another author who has done a similar study with a slightly different focus is Kate Sturge who wrote the book "*Representing Others - Translation, Ethnography and the Museum*" (2007). Sturge looked at how cultural anthropology has often used "translation" as a metaphor to describe the interpretation of

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<sup>34</sup> Smith & Akagawa 2009

<sup>35</sup> Brumann & Cox (2009[2010])

<sup>36</sup> Payne 2010:88

<sup>37</sup> Karp & Lavine 1991

ethnographic processes and cross-cultural comparisons. Sturge writes that the issues of representation and understandability become central to both translation studies and ethnographic writing. In a similar way there has been a discussion problem of multimedia “translation” in museums where there has been remarkably little cross-disciplinary exchange, according to Sturge. Museums in translation studies have still not managed to keep up with the anthropological studies of meaning, representation, and “culture”. Sturge asserts that neither anthropology nor museology has looked at “translation studies” for the analysis of language differences or specific methods.

These works make interesting contributions to an analysis of how museums work in different ways with ICH and its values, as well as the problems that arise when you do not take them into account, from the perspective of language, cultural anthropology and ethnography.

My study focused on how two Swedish museum institutions with different approaches responded to the post-museum paradigm that goes from being object fixed to be more person-oriented, within these theoretical frameworks.

## 2. UNESCO CONVENTION FOR ICH AND MUSEUMS

In this chapter, I examined the UNESCO Convention (2003). This was in order to reach a broader understanding of how the Convention works and its contents and approach. I have explored in some depth the five key areas and assessed their importance for my research questions.

### 2.1 UNESCO Convention for safeguarding ICH and the five key domains

The definition of ICH<sup>38</sup> is manifested in oral traditions and expression that include language; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and universe as well as traditional craftsmanship<sup>39</sup>. UNESCO has further defined the different key areas and explains them more thoroughly.

#### **Article 2.2 (a) Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage**

According to UNESCO's definition, the 'oral traditions and expressions domain' encompasses a range of spoken forms including, for example, prayers, tales, nursery rhymes, myths, charts, legends, dramatic performances, epic songs and poems, riddles, and song. Oral traditions and expressions are used to pass on knowledge, cultural and social values and collective memory which all play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive. UNESCO states that the most important part of safeguarding oral traditions and expression is to maintain their everyday role in society. Communities, researchers and institutions are encouraged to use information technology to help safeguard the full range of oral traditions, including textual variations and different styles of performance. Mass media and communication technologies can be used not only to preserve but to even strengthen oral traditions and expressions by broadcasting recorded performances<sup>40</sup>.

#### **Article 2.2 (b) Performing arts**

There is a range in the performing arts from theatre to pantomime to dance, instrumental and vocal music and beyond. All of the numerous cultural expressions reflects human creativity and are also found, to some extent, in other ICH key areas. According to UNESCO music is perhaps the most universal of all the performing arts and is found in every society, most often as an essential part of other performing art forms and domains of ICH including festive events, oral traditions and rituals. Music can be also be found in the most diverse contexts such as classical or popular, sacred or profane and is often closely connected to work and entertainment. The spaces, artefacts and objects associated with cultural expressions and practices are all included in the convention's definition of ICH. In the performing arts there are costumes, mask, musical instruments and other body decorations used in dance, and props of theatre and scenery are also included. The different performing arts are often performed in specific places, considered to be cultural spaces by the convention. The Convention states that measures for safeguarding traditional performing arts should focus mainly on transmission of knowledge and techniques. UNESCO argues that performances may also be researched, archived, inventoried, recorded and documented. Cultural media, industries and institutions can play an important part in ensuring the viability of traditional forms of performing arts by developing audiences- and raising awareness amongst the general public<sup>41</sup>.

#### **Article 2.2 (c) Rituals and festive events**

These events are habitual activities that structure the lives of communities and groups. They are significant because they reaffirm the identity of those who practice them as a society or a group and whether performed in private or not these are intimately linked to important events. These practices also help to mark the passing of the seasons, the agricultural calendar or stages of a person's life. UNESCO emphasizes that ensuring the continuity of these events often requires the mobilization of large numbers of individuals and the legal, social and political institutions and mechanism of a society.

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<sup>38</sup> See the definition of ICH in UNESCO Convention in page 8

<sup>39</sup> UNESCO Convention (2003) Article 2

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00053>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00054>

UNESCO further stresses that it might be desirable to encourage the broadest public participation possible, and in some cases that legal and formal measurements are taken to guarantee the right of access to the community's crucial objects and sacred places etc.<sup>42</sup>

#### **Article 2.2 (d) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and universe**

In this part, representations, knowhow, skills and practices developed by communities through interactions with the natural environment are included. This includes ways of thinking about the universe expressed through oral traditions, language feeling of attachment towards memories, place, worldview and spirituality. They also strongly influence the values and beliefs that underlie many social practices and cultural traditions. They are in turn formed by the community's wider world and natural environment. UNESCO stresses that safeguarding a world view or system beliefs is more challenging than preserving a natural environment and argues that protecting the natural environment is often linked to safeguarding a community's cosmology as well as other examples of its ICH<sup>43</sup>.

#### **Article 2.2 (e) Traditional craftsmanship**

This section might be the most tangible manifestation of ICH and is mainly concerned with the knowledge and skills involved in the processes of craftsmanship rather than the product itself. UNESCO stresses that safeguarding attempts should focus on encouraging artisans to continue to produce crafts and to pass down their knowledge and skills onto others, especially within their own communities. The goals with safeguarding, aside from the aforementioned, are to provide livelihoods for artisans and to enhance creativity. One proven way of reinforcing and strengthening these systems, according to UNESCO, is to offer financial incentives to students and teachers, amongst others, to make knowledge transfer more attractive to both<sup>44</sup>. UNESCO's Convention list of key domains is intended to be inclusive rather than exclusive and not necessarily meant to be complete. UNESCO argues that states may use a different system of domains since there is already a range of variation with some countries dividing up the manifestation of ICH differently<sup>45</sup>.

## **2.2 The Roles of Museums in safeguarding ICH**

Under this section I critically focus on the UNESCO Convention (2003), the Shanghai charter, the declaration of Seoul as well as ICOM's definition as a framework, potential and actual, of the roles of museums in safeguarding ICH.

In 2004 the General Assembly of ICOM, held in Seoul 2004, adopted the "*Declaration of Seoul*". The Seoul Declaration of ICOM on the Intangible Heritage declaration highlights the importance of creating ways in how museum should work with ICH. Among other things the declaration aims to:

4. Invite all relevant museums involved in the collection, preservation and promotion of the intangible heritage to give particular attention to the conservation of all perishable records, notably electronic and documentary heritage resources;
8. Recommends that all training programs for museum professionals stress the importance of intangible heritage and include the understanding of intangible heritage as a requirement for qualification;
9. Recommends that the Executive Council, working with the International Committee for the Training of Personnel (ICTOP), introduce the necessary adjustments as soon as possible into the ICOM Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development (1971, latest revision 1999)<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00055>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00056>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00057>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00052>

<sup>46</sup> Seoul declaration 2004

According to the ICOM Statutes, adopted during the 21st General Conference in Vienna, Austria, in 2007:

a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment...<sup>47</sup>

At the 7<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Regional Assembly of ICOM on “*Museums, Intangible Heritage and Globalization*” the participants affirmed in their Charter that the:

significance of creativity, adaptability and the distinctiveness of peoples, places and communities as the framework in which the voices, values, traditions, languages, oral history, folk life and so on are recognised and promoted in all museological and heritage practices, recommend that museums as facilitators of constructive partnerships in the safeguarding of this heritage of humanity<sup>48</sup>.

Putting this into practice is a challenge and in 2004 UNESCO assembled an expert meeting with the goal to establish a framework for putting the Convention into practice and to clarify how ICOM and UNESCO can cooperate productively and what role the museums should have in this<sup>49</sup>.

Acknowledging and recognizing practice that takes place outside the museum’s walls could be, according to the expert meeting, an important first step towards safeguarding<sup>50</sup>. Provisions of supporting expertise in undertaken research, in establishing connections with other national institutions and with UNESCO (if required) in order to obtain moral or financial support could be a second concrete role for museum according to participants in the expert meeting<sup>51</sup>. The expert meeting also emphasized that museums could explore ways in which living heritage practices might be related to existing collections, and harnessed to the interpretation of those collections for the people whom the museum serves. It is possible that living heritage could be used to reconnect the museum with practitioners in its catchment area and actually livens up collection elements. The case of the Swedish Ethnographic Museum’s totem pole is a good example of exchange and relationship that is in itself a living dynamic part of contemporary culture<sup>52</sup>. The original was reclaimed by the Haisla people in Canada<sup>53</sup>, who came to an agreement with the museum to make them a new one<sup>54</sup>.

The UNESCO Convention (2003) has challenged museums all over the world to incorporate the voices of, for example, source communities into their exhibitions and to organize them through collaborative works with representatives of the culture in focus, and thereby providing them with a chance to represent their own culture<sup>55</sup>. According to Dr. Hilary du Cros, author of “*Intangible Cultural Heritage, Education and Museums*” (2012), knowledge transfer and different education programs that uses tradition bearers, ‘living treasures’<sup>56</sup>, performers and artists are all important for promoting the continuity of ICH. She argues that one way to safeguard this type of intangible heritage is to establish cultural spaces that enable the transmission of contextual information to visitors (such as museum, parks, cultural centers, music halls etc.) that tradition bearers, artisans and performers can be encouraged to frequent<sup>57</sup>. By providing this, du Cros emphasizes that the value of what they do and know can be re-affirmed and recorded<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> ICOM, 2001

<sup>48</sup> Shanghai Charter 2002

<sup>49</sup> UNESCO Expert meeting “*The Roles of museum in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*”2004:1-2

<sup>50</sup> UNESCO Expert meeting “*The Roles of museum in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*”2004: 2

<sup>51</sup> UNESCO Expert meeting “*The Roles of museum in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*”2004: 2

<sup>52</sup> UNESCO Expert meeting “*The Roles of museum in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*” 2004:3-4

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/etnografiskamuseet/om-museet/om-byggnaden/>

<sup>54</sup> UNESCO Expert meeting “*The Roles of museum in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*” 2004:3-4

<sup>55</sup> Yoshida 2004:110

<sup>56</sup> Is a Japanese popular term for those individuals certified as “Preservers of Important Intangible Cultural Properties”

<sup>57</sup> du Cros 2012:3

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, .p.3

## 2.3 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding ICH in Sweden

On January 2011 the Swedish government ratified the UNESCO Convention for safeguarding ICH<sup>59</sup> meaning that Sweden has committed itself to comply with the convention. A three year assignment was given to the Department of Language and Folklore, in Uppsala<sup>60</sup>, to develop the implementation of the Convention<sup>61</sup>, involving the Swedish Arts- Council<sup>62</sup>. The Convention for safeguarding of ICH aims to:

- a) safeguard intangible cultural heritage;
- b) ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- c) raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;
- d) provide for international cooperation and assistance<sup>63</sup>

Sweden, as a convention state, shall strive to, among others to:

-foster scientific, technical and artistic studies, as well as research methodologies, with a view to effective safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage and to;  
-adopt appropriate legal, technical, administrative and financial measures aimed at:  
-foster the creation or strengthening of institutions for training in the management of the intangible cultural heritage and the transmission of such heritage through forums and spaces intended for the performance or expression /.../<sup>64</sup>

A part of the Swedish Department of Language and Folklore mission was to ensure that a future organization (for issues relating to ICH) included representatives for indigenous Sami people and other national minorities, the performing arts, educational associations and non-governmental actors and organizations in general. In a report<sup>65</sup> written in June 2012, the Department of Language and Folklore presented a summary of their responses that pointed out the importance of an "equal work". This meant that they wanted to ensure that not only representatives with interests regarding documentation and archiving were part of the future organization, but also actors and organizations working for the preservation of *living cultural heritage*. They also observed that national minorities has not been given sufficient attention thus highlighting the importance of paying attention to different immigrant groups<sup>66</sup>. As part of their mission, the Department of Language and Folklore worked to lay the foundation for an organization that comprised the thematic main areas included in the convention. They also wanted to ensure that all stakeholders were identified and represented. This was an important factor, that as far as possible, all stakeholders should be involved in the management of the ICH for the importance of broad representations. This could increase the knowledge about museum collections ICH and create multifaceted exhibitions.

## 2.4 Analysis of convention for ICH and the museum in Sweden

The definition of ICH in the Convention<sup>67</sup> focuses not on artefacts or places but on the living culture that is a part of every human being. Knowledge that is held and created by humans through centuries constantly constructs and reconstructs peoples' sense of identity that forms in various social

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<sup>59</sup> Kulturradet.se

<sup>60</sup> A Swedish city

<sup>61</sup> Institutionen för språk och folkminne 2014(:7 ). Ku2010/1980/KT

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.kulturradet.se/sv/verksamhet/Internationellt/Unesco-ny/Konventionen-om-tryggandet-av-det-immateriella-kulturarvet/>

<sup>63</sup> UNESCO Convention (2003) Article 1

<sup>64</sup> UNESCO Convention (2003) Article 13

<sup>65</sup> Institutionen för språk och folkminne 2014(:17-18 ). Ku2010/1980/KT

<sup>66</sup> Institutionen för språk och folkminne 2014(:17-18 ). Ku2010/1980/KT

<sup>67</sup> See page 8

interactions. As such knowledge and cultures are dynamic and not static, ICH therefore should be seen as something living and ever changing.

The different key domains and UNESCO's further explanation of how different institutions can work to safeguard these are vital and already in practice in different museums, especially those working in the field of ethnography, traditional culture and folk life that have been working closely with different communities<sup>68</sup>. For example, knowledge of traditional language has been very actively promoted by the use of multilingual labelling of exhibition and through audio-visual presentations<sup>69</sup>. As far as performing arts, du Cros and Boylan points out that many, not all museums serves as important cultural centers for their own communities<sup>70</sup>. For example, "Confusion" is a non-profit organization and one of Sweden's biggest events for East Asian popular culture (music, manga, food, anime etc). The first event was held at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg 2011 in conjunction with the museum's Japanese fashion exhibition, Kimono Fusion<sup>71</sup>. This is a good example of how a museum can create opportunities for events of this nature to occur and create opportunities to transmit knowledge. Many museums also promote local traditional events that are important to some of their local populations with special exhibitions etc. The fourth key domain "knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe" is an area that is of great interest to many ethnographic and historical museums (amongst others). Several ethnographic and natural history museums in the developing world are for example according to Boylan, researching traditional herbal medicine<sup>72</sup>. In the last key domain "traditional craftsmanship" Boylan argues that the two most important aspects of an object of traditional craftsmanship are not only in the way in it has been made, but in the way in which it was used. So not only should museums investigate and record, for example techniques and methods of use, but they can also play a crucial part in ensuring that these skills and techniques are maintained<sup>73</sup>. What's important for living cultures are not the objects themselves, but the knowledge about these objects. Museums can function as a forum where different people can meet and integrate with one another and develop their identity and learn about their traditions.

The museums roles are evident in safeguarding of ICH, and are strongly encouraged by the Convention to incorporate the voices of people and to organize exhibitions through collaborations with representatives. The museums should also provide them with opportunities to represent their own cultures. ICOM and UNESCO have acknowledged the part museums *should* play in safeguarding of ICH which is just as importance as archiving the various aspect of ICH. But how the museums actually go about this, if in fact they do, is a key question that I will explore in Chapter 5.

The differences between the tangible and the intangible can sometimes be very delicate because often the preservation of intangible and tangible are intimately conjoined. Intangible heritage reveals the cultural significance and value of museum collections. Objects are related to their use and production and present their deeper meaning through interpretation. For instance Nô masks could be exhibited as an art objects in museums with artistic and technical use but also as engine of introducing visitors to the symbolic expression of its original, that is derived from Shintoism and Buddhism.

During the three years 2011-2014, the Department of Language and Folklore concluded that the Convention was a viable platform to formulate and develop Swedish cultural heritage. Their work has already led to new relationships and exchanges between different kinds of actors such as Sami people and museums. They argue that further work may lead to increased visibility<sup>74</sup>. The department proposes that the work with safeguarding of ICH from 2015 goes into an ongoing development work that every fourth year is evaluated<sup>75</sup>. The Department also proposes among others that a new

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<sup>68</sup> Boylan 2006:57

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.58

<sup>70</sup> du Cros 2012:3 and

<sup>71</sup> <http://forening.confusion.nu/sv/huvudsida/>

<sup>72</sup> Boylan 2006: 58-59

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.60

<sup>74</sup> Institutionen för språk och folkminne 2014(:10 ). Ku2010/1980/KT

<sup>75</sup> Institutionen för språk och folkminne 2014(:10 ). Ku2010/1980/KT



government grant should be established, for special efforts to secure, redistribute and vitalize ICH in Sweden from 2015<sup>76</sup>.

The Convention has raised important issues that have forced museums, amongst other, to assess their role in safeguarding of ICH. ICOM have from the start been strong advocates for safeguarding ICH and in their turn have put a lot of weight on other museum bodies. ICOM created “*ICOM Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development*” to aid other museum bodies in their new expected roles, which is the focus of the next chapter.

This chapter serves to understand the expectations that Röhsska and the Ethnographic museums have in their work with safeguarding of their collections ICH. By exploring, in some depth, the five key areas and assess their importance I can in a more analytical way analyze how my illustrated examples worked in accordance to the Convention and in what way. This chapter also serves to broaden the understanding of the importance of educational programs and collaboration with source communities or other museum bodies that contributes to the knowledge transfer in safeguarding museum collections ICH.

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<sup>76</sup> Institutionen för språk och folkminne 2014(:62 ). Ku2010/1980/KT

### 3. ICOM AND MUSEUMS

In this chapter, I explore more about the organization ICOM and their position in the preservation of ICH and how they think museums should work. I also examine ICOMs guidelines to gain a greater understanding of how these are applied. This creates a framework for the examination of how/ if Röhsska Museum and the Ethnographic Museum follow these guidelines, and how consistently.

#### 3.1 ICOM

ICOM is the international organization of museums and museum professionals committed to the conservation, continuation and communication to society of the world's natural and cultural heritage, intangible as well as tangible<sup>77</sup>.

In 1971 at Jos, Nigeria ICOM received a contract from UNESCO to review programs of international bilingual museum training center, and based on ICTOP analysis and survey of 'best practices' the first recommended UNESCO-ICOM curriculum for museum professional training was published. The document mainly consisted of complex and detailed themes that should be included in a museum training program. It was revised at intervals by ICTOP with the consideration of changes in the museum world. By 1996 this was becoming out of date and ICTOP began a complete revision, with other experts and ICTOP members they came to conclusion that the 1971 structure required a completely new approach. The first outcome of the revision was based on two key concepts of:

- Continuing professional development through lifelong learning

- The acquiring (and the assessment where required) of competence relating to both the specifics of museum work and the professional's own specialization and to general skills<sup>78</sup>

This new approach got the new title "*ICOM Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development*" and got adopted by ICTOP in 1998<sup>79</sup>.

#### 3.2 ICOMs Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development

The ICOM guidelines (*The Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development*) are organized into five broad areas of competence; general work requirements, museology, management, public programming, and information and collections management and care. The purpose of the guidelines is to provide a framework to the museum profession for meeting the learning needs of the future. The content has been gathered from numerous sources all around the world<sup>80</sup>. The document emphasizes a broader system for understanding the museum and the individual's roles and responsibilities and provides information from which informed decisions/ judgements based on for example; values, resources, and experiences can be made at different occasions by individual or institutions.

The guidelines strive to respond to continued learning needs of museum staff, and is expected to be acquired little by little throughout the course of a career and through combination of informal and formal instructional formats. Examples of this include supervised internships, study tours, academic instruction, professional associations, leadership activities, research paper, short-term training and fellowships.

In ICOMs guidelines there is a section called "*Community Museology*" under the headline "*Museology Competence: Knowledge of and skills in the application of the intellectual foundations of museum work*" which shows that the team who created the guidelines were aware of the importance for museums of living ICH. For example, by underlining the need for training programs to develop awareness of the need to comprehend the interaction between communities and processes which

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<sup>77</sup> <http://network.icom.museum/ictop/about-us/who-we-are/>

<sup>78</sup> Boylan 2006: 61-62

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.62

<sup>80</sup> <http://museumstudies.si.edu/ICOM-ICTOP/about.htm>

originate from community efforts and their heritage and economic development<sup>81</sup>.

Under section four “*Public programming competencies: Knowledge of and skills in serving the museum's communities*” you can find “*Communication*” which highlights the importance of developing knowledge of the dynamics of symbolic experience and semiotics (what things signify). Furthermore; communication theory, developing communication linkage and creating relevant focal points and forums for exchange of ideas thus orientation- physical, intellectual and signage (labeling etc.)<sup>82</sup>, in order to have more effective dialogue with different communities; safeguard their ICH.

### 3.4 Analysis of the relevance of ICOM guidelines for museums

The implementation of ICOMs guidelines could inevitably change how the museum have operated in the past and will not only transform the relationship between the museum and their stakeholders but also the museums relationship to their visitors.

The ICOM guidelines encouraged people from different parts of the world to come forth and together with museums participate in extensive dialogue about their intangible cultural heritage to support knowledge transfer, but also to take part in determining how they want their culture to be defined and preserved. The knowledge will no longer be one sided from the museums part alone, but will become more multi-vocal as the museums strives to collaborate with different communities to create new interpretation and knowledge.

The implementation of ICOM guidelines could be important for both museums and living ICH. Although the ICOM guidelines speak of necessary demands they do not say how museums (financially) can work towards this. A common problem that many museums face today is limited resources, at least in Sweden, and the ICOM guidelines require that museums can devote time and money to send staff on, for example, internships for a shorter/ longer period of time or to provide for a guest professor. Networking and establishing necessary connections for preservation of museum collections ICH takes time, and is particularly demanding when the museums are housing collections from living cultural heritage across the globe, since it often requires specially trained staff that not only know the specific collection of that culture but also, preferably, speak and read their language. Since, for example the Ethnographic museums, house collections from all around the world, they would need special trained staff for each and every one of their collection and a budget to let them work with the safeguarding of the different collections and all it entails. There is no room for that in most museums budgets today, even though this has proven to be necessary<sup>83</sup>.

There are ways in which museums can work with ICOM guidelines that do not require such extensive resources. For example, they could view ways they work with ICH for different cultures in connection to their activities or different programs, and deepen these areas of activity. Boylan concludes

/.../ members of the museum profession needs to adopt an open, outward- looking, view of their own role and that of their institutions within society, and in particular in relation to the protection and promotion of the intangible heritage/.../<sup>84</sup>

Culture is a complex system of different classifications of symbols that are shared in different societies and understood only through social interactions. These symbols form a “web of meaning” for individuals in each culture, and the symbols often lose their meaning when divorced from their original relationship and context with other symbols. By having a deep-rooted understanding of semiotics (symbols and meanings) of a culture, museum staffs are better equipped to understand how to safeguard different collections ICH in the museums. The Convention could therefore be used as the basis for training approaches.

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<sup>81</sup> Boylan 2006:62

<sup>82</sup> <http://museumstudies.si.edu/ICOM-ICTOP/comp.htm>

<sup>83</sup> See paragraph “UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding the ICH in Sweden”

<sup>84</sup> Boylan 2006: 64

Both the UNESCO Convention (2003) and ICOM guidelines strongly highlights, among others, the importance of continuously developing knowledge of the dynamics of symbolic experience and semiotics. In the next chapter I will outline the ICH around a specific part of a Japanese collection in order to supply an intellectual framework for analysis of the illustrated examples in chapter five.

## 4. JAPANESE ART HISTORY AND SYMBOLISM

In this chapter, I explore the intangible qualities of Japanese objects within western museum collection through critically analyzing literature associated with main belief system in Japanese cultural tradition. I examine the impact and importance that Japanese religions have had on Japanese symbolism and artistic expression as well as culture to assess the level of knowledge and engagement in the museum display.

Japanese collections are often more than just their appearance, the objects are symbols that together or individually exist in a web of significance, and museums need to have a thorough understanding of their meaning or semiotics to begin working with preservation of their ICH value in a way to correspond to the UNESCO convention of safeguarding of ICH (2003) and ICOM guidelines. This chapter will also serve to analyze the level of knowledge there is about the Japanese objects the selected museums have chosen to exhibit.

### 4.1 Brief overview of Japanese belief system

Earhart argues that to understand Japanese religions we must view them as a united whole since the individual strands did not exist in isolation and, throughout Japanese history, each strand was influenced by one or more of the others. An example of what Earhart means is Shinto, which arose out of ancient Japanese religious practices<sup>85</sup>, was organized more systematically in reaction to the introduction of Buddhism, and also assimilated some aspects of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. An important thing to have in mind when working with Japanese collections is that any one of the strands such as Shinto, is not simply Shinto, it is a combination of several influences<sup>86</sup>. Unlike in the West where people normally claim to be Protestant, Jewish or Catholic, commonly as “members” of specific religious institutions, it has been a custom for people in Japan for a family/ person to participate in both Shinto festivals and Buddhism memorial services, practice Confucian ethics, and to follow beliefs of Taoism. It is a matter of “both/and” instead of “either/ or” according to Earhart<sup>87</sup>. If one asked a Japanese person “are you Shinto or Buddhist, Taoist or Confucian?” a response could simply be “yes”. There wouldn’t be a contradiction in this answer for the person would have participated in the various traditions at different moments of her or his life. Usually the Japanese people found religious fulfillment not simply in one tradition by itself but in the total sacred power embodiment in number of traditions<sup>88</sup>.

A way to understand this is to see Japanese heritage as both diverse and united. It is a complex culture that requires a deep-rooted understanding of the different religious strands that have formed Japanese culture and society.

Since prehistoric times belief systems have played an important role in Japanese life and development. There is archaeological evidence that has dated religious activities in Japan as far back as two thousand years. Japanese religions are not a single solitary ecclesiastical body, such as Roman Catholicism, but include various individual traditions, native imported, organized and free. Over time, different influences interacted to form distinct religious systems<sup>89</sup>. In Earhart’s book “*Japanese religion. Unity and Diversity*” (2004) he stresses that “Japanese religion” is not a title of a specific religious organization, but rather a general abstraction that we can use to refer to the total Japanese religious heritage which is their institutions, beliefs and practices. Japanese religions are an interweaving of at least five major strands: Shinto, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and folk religions. In this thesis the (Zen) Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism are of interest for my inquiry.

Outsiders, unfamiliar with Japanese belief system, find it difficult to tell the difference between formal concrete religious symbols such as from Buddhism from Shintoism. Syncretism is a

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<sup>85</sup> Such as rituals related to the growing of rice

<sup>86</sup> Earhart 2004: 3

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.4

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.4

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.1

widespread phenomenon in Japan and is according to Borup (2012), author of “*Zen and the trick to partying with the gods*”<sup>90</sup>, seen as an expression of a common religion<sup>91</sup>. When Buddhism came to Japan it didn’t take long before the Japanese people linked it together with Shinto. Ever since it has almost been impossible to distinguish between these two religions since before modern times, they have worked side by side as parts of a religious system. Although Buddhism and Shinto were formally separated after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 the close relationship is still strong<sup>92</sup>. According to Borup this syncretism is still present in temples and shrines as well as in Japanese consciousness, which has created a foundation for openness and inclusion, and explains why most Japanese people can belong to several religions at the same time<sup>93</sup>. Religious cooperation is also demonstrated by religions “part the work”, for instance, Shinto shrines are used for parties and celebration of life. This is where parents show off their newborns to the gods (*miyamairi*) and also where children celebrate their 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> birthdays (*shichi go san*). Confucianism, based on the Chinese thinker Confucius’ thoughts has historically given the Japanese an ethical foundation and a code of conduct. The religious handling of death is reserved to Buddhism, while Taoism guides Japanese people everyday life, mainly through the calendar and divinations.

To summarize; many Japanese people are born Shinto, die Buddhist, and are raised according to Confucian ideals as well as consume a Taoist inspired folk religion<sup>94</sup>. In order to safeguard Japanese objects ICH, an understanding of how Japanese culture and society function is important, since they are sides of the same page. Knowledge of these has its significance in the interpretation of these objects and how to highlight and nuance, for example, the narrations of these objects in different museum exhibition.

## 4.2 The impact of different strands of religion on Japanese art

To understand the symbolical meanings and significance of Nô masks, chadô (tea ceremony) and metal arts, and the impact they have on Japanese past and contemporary society it is necessary to make a quick exploration of the different strands impact on Japanese art. Knowing these objects’ symbolical significance is also an important way for museums to work with the preservation of the objects ICH.

### Shinto

Shinto which means “the way of the Gods” is a formal religion of shrines, priests, rituals and myths. Shinto emerged from the beliefs and practices of prehistoric Japan, and also through close religious contact with China and Korea. Central for Shinto is the notion of Japan as the land of the kami (Gods) who both embody national tradition and inhabit the natural surroundings of every locality. There are small Shinto shrines in small villages and also on roof tops of city departments which is a living proof of that pervasiveness Shinto has in Japan<sup>95</sup>. Amy Reigle Newland, author of “*The Forms of Shinto*” (1986) writes that in the Shinto ideology there is a belief that all sentient beings are the common offspring of kami and therefore are endowed with their spiritual force and presence. The Japanese fear and awe of the mysteries of nature could therefore be explained by the existence of kami, which also served to explain the creation of the world<sup>96</sup>. The ideal of the Shinto is purity; simplicity and harmony with nature which can be seen in the architecture of Shinto shrines which very seldom have decoration<sup>97</sup>.

### Zen Buddhism

The entrance of Buddhism through China and Korea came to change Japan and also effect Japanese art expression. The development of the Zen arts were heavily influenced by the concepts of other

<sup>90</sup> Author translation, original title is “Zen och konsten att festa med gudarna”

<sup>91</sup> Borup 2012: 104

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.p.104

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.,p.104

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.,p.104- 105

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.,p.2

<sup>96</sup> Reigle Newland 1986:194

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.,p.194

religious traditions which did not conflict with Buddhist doctrine and could be expressed in an aesthetic form and were entirely compatible with other religious strands like Shinto, Confucianism and Taoism<sup>98</sup>. According to Rupert Cox (2003) the term Zen arts has no Japanese equivalent. They include the procedure for making and appreciating green tea (tea ceremony), a highly stylized form of theatre (nô drama), calligraphy, various fighting system of martial arts amongst other which all are highly imported intangible aspects of Zen arts<sup>99</sup>. The Buddhist art of Japan produced a great body of work with distinctly Japanese aesthetics and qualities<sup>100</sup>. Zen Buddhism in Japan, at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century was one of the most important religious and cultural impacts in the Early Feudal period and according to Mason (1993), one that has had a profound effect on Japanese society and intellectual history even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>101</sup>. Zen arts are recognized by certain institutional features, social practices and all the aesthetic and spiritual values which all are attached to their text, space objects and actions<sup>102</sup>. Over time, Zen practice and thought have had an effect on Japanese culture and place a high value on simplicity, economy of means and the perception of beauty in the world<sup>103</sup>. Fisher (1993) stated that Zen works functioned as a stimulant, an activator of one's spiritual growth and that Zen objects generally rely on suggestion and imitation that demand that the devotee should play a greater role in the search for personal enlightenment<sup>104</sup>.

### **Confucianism**

Confucianism is the Chinese tradition that in the sixth century B.C. was set in motion by the teachings of Confucius which later came to be institutionalized by the Chinese state and accepted in other parts of Asia. Confucius grew up in a China that was plagued by social and political difficulties and who insisted that they would go back to benevolence and virtue. After his death, his teachings became the base of education and government and served as a broader justification for social and political hierarchical relationships within the agricultural economy. Confucius provided a comprehensive system for ordering governmental and social harmony which strongly emphasized family stability and filial piety (obedience of children to parents), and different parts of Confucianism teachings have been prominent in Japan<sup>105</sup>. Different traditional themes from the Kanô school under Muromachi (1333-1573) and Momoyama period (1573-1615) depict Japanese themes as birds and flowers of the four seasons were in harmony with Confucian principles<sup>106</sup>.

### **Taoism**

Both Taoism and Confucianism emerged in China. Earhart writes that Taoism developed "out of ancient Chinese reverence for nature and notion of the orderly but ever changing rhythm of the cosmos"<sup>107</sup>. A lot of Taoist beliefs and practices have much in common with Chinese religious customs associated with cosmological notions, the calendar and divinations. Despite the fact that Taoism never existed in Japan as a formal religion, elements of Taoism were accepted and heavily influenced Shinto and Buddhism<sup>108</sup>. Cox wrote that the Zen arts standardized forms supplied interpretations and representation of how to act. He explains that in these forms, *kata* for instance in *chadô* (tea ceremony), particular actions do have symbolic values. For example, as they prepare for tea, this is oriented to a Taoist cosmological scheme<sup>109</sup>. Performing *kata* with concentration and awareness enables a person to experience and to express an aesthetic realm<sup>110</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> Cox 2003:53

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.,p.1

<sup>100</sup> Mason 1993:33

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.,p.174

<sup>102</sup> Cox 2003:1

<sup>103</sup> Mason 1993: 174

<sup>104</sup> Fisher 1993: 163

<sup>105</sup> Earhart 2004: 2-3

<sup>106</sup> Mason 1993:244

<sup>107</sup> Earhart 2004:2

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.,p.:2-3

<sup>109</sup> Cox 2002:109- 110

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.,p.110

### 4.3 Japanese metaphoric symbols

There are a lot of varieties of metaphoric symbols in Japan. With the passage of time the Japanese increasingly used plants as metaphorical symbols. Baird, author of “*Symbols of Japan: thematic motifs in art and design*” (2001) wrote that many metaphorical linkages were so conventionalized that only half an equation needed to be cited for the viewer or reader to immediately comprehend the other<sup>111</sup>. For example the fallen cherry blossom could be used to refer to the poignancy or warriors dying young without explicitly depicting a warrior<sup>112</sup>. Baird explains:

The most complex of Japan’s metonymic symbols are defined narrowly and specifically while the phenomena which they represent are broad in scope and rich in meaning. With such a dynamic at play, simple objects like a sword, a conch shell, and *biwa* lute can be used to represent, respectively, the way of the warrior, the life of an eremitic monk, and a blind priest lamenting the tragic fate of the Taira family in the Gempei wars<sup>113</sup>.

Furthermore, China’s impact on Japanese design can be seen clearly in the different motifs. The Japanese took not only a host of symbols from China but also conventions that Chinese artisans and artists used to handle motifs which included the representation of certain plants and animals as fixed pairs such as, the Japanese nightingale and plum, the tiger and bamboo etc. According to Far Eastern ideas, plants and everyday objects are more interconnected than they are in Western culture; they are among the mythical archetypes which combine the unconscious with the conscious<sup>114</sup>. Another convention of symbolic motif in Japan that is very significant is the fixed grouping of trios or quarters of animals, plants, pine and bamboo in China known as the Three Friends of Winter<sup>115</sup>. It is very common to see these kinds of motifs on *tsubas* (sword guards) among others. The symbolical language in Japan is vast and just as in, for example China, animals and flowers were very often ascribed human characteristics with great power, qualities and particular functions.

The symbolism in Japanese objects is multifaceted, and therefore the understanding of the richness of the intangible heritage is the key that enables meaningful preservation.

### 4.4 Nô masks function and symbolism

Museums hold the responsibility not only to preserve and display nô masks but also decide what relevant information to bring forth for guidance in the appreciation their attributes and qualities. Nô masks are an important component of the nô drama which is permeated by Zen Buddhism aesthetics and is one of the oldest types of theatre in Japan in which the protagonists (*shite*) wear masks. Nô drama is usually referred to as symbolic and many of the dramas are connected with religious events of Buddhism and Shinto.

Nô masks and nô drama can trace its history all the way back to ancient shamanistic rites performed in sacred places in order to make contact and to communicate with the spirit world<sup>116</sup>. During the fourteenth century the uniquely nô masks became fully developed and according to John Mach, author of “*Masks: the art of expression*” (1994), the art of carving continues with contemporary artists producing exquisite work. Nô as a dramatic art form came in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries under two skilled actors Kan’ami (1333-1384) and his son Zeami (1363-1443), and grew out of the earliest folk performances of *Dengaku* and *Sarugaku*, both of which used masks<sup>117</sup>.

The nô masks were worn to represent the *kami* divinities or *tama* that can be explain as ancestral spirits summoned that were celebrated and entertained on these occasions. These masks were thought to serve as vessels in which spirits would reside, and as such the masks were considered to be

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<sup>111</sup> Baird 2001:10

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.,p.10

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.,p.13

<sup>114</sup> Wichmann 1981:294

<sup>115</sup> Baird 2001:18

<sup>116</sup> Payne 2010:80

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.,p.140



sacred<sup>118</sup>. Nô masks are generally neutral in expression, and it is the skill of the actor that brings the mask to life through subtle changes in his physical attitude<sup>119</sup>. When portraying characters for instance of females, the actor must totally convince the audience of the part he is playing. The nô masks symbolize the personality of the character it portrays. One very important moment of the mask carvers specialized in nô masks is when the mask carver “opens” the eyes of the mask, because then the mask is brought to life<sup>120</sup>. The nô masks are very small and cover only the front of the face, and have small eyeholes. The nô masks are often carved out from a single piece of Japanese cypress wood. The finished mask is then coated with layers of gesso mixed with glue and it is the sanding down of these layers that give the mask its final shape<sup>121</sup>. The nô mask is revered as the souls of the play and is respected both off and on stage. Payne, author of “*Nô masks in nô drama*” (2010), explains that when the masks are worn in performances, they still are considered to assume, if not the true presence, then at least the attributes of their character, many of whom are tortured souls or gods<sup>122</sup>. Within the nô world the high status of the mask is connected to the deep emotional significance that it holds for the actor, who bonds with it in a relationship of a very intimate mutual identification<sup>123</sup>. All roles in the nô plays, before modern time, were played by men, even female roles. Before going on stage the actors aim to create a sense of nothingness and otherness so that he is no longer aware of himself. The nô mask becomes the psychological and physical medium through which the actor created a new being and are regarded as semi-sacred objects and as performing tools<sup>124</sup>.

#### 4.5 Chadô function and symbolism

The tea ceremony, with its complicated ritual, is an example of a perfect combination of aesthetic and social integration. The detailed and complex movements of patterns the tea master executes while preparing the tea is similar to kata, which the samurai used to try to achieve perfection in his sword technique. The tea ceremony can be seen as an “inner martial art” and was regarded as an important expression for the samurai’s aesthetical perception<sup>125</sup>.

Tea drinking in Japan probably started among the higher classes in the Asuka and Nara (538-794) or the Heian period (794-1185) as part of Chinese cultural and technical influence. Tea drinking had both a symbolic and a practical side as well as a medical function and played an important role in Buddhist temples while meditating<sup>126</sup>. Two concepts in the tea ceremony are chadô “the way of the tea” or cha-no-yu “hot water for tea”. The word chadô indicates a view of the tea ceremony as a spiritual and personal journey through life and is often used by the tea ceremony practitioners themselves. Cha-no-yu has been termed a social, religious, aesthetically and symbolic choreographic happening<sup>127</sup>. Its symbolic form is used for educational purposes, and the monks considered it to be a good teaching method and a good way to preserve knowledge. A deeper meaning is also added in the gardens and flower arrangements etc. and the relevant objects place and appearance<sup>128</sup>. Kakemono<sup>129</sup> is one of the most important symbols. On these you can read some of the teachers’ revered words. Kakemono can also be a painting that brings your mind to a scenic place, or persons that distinguished themselves. Each object has its special meaning and name whose deep hidden meaning is not always given<sup>130</sup>. For example, the shape of the teakettle is supposed to represent Japan’s sacred mountain Fuji, or in other cases symbolize a rustic hut. The tea kettle’s ritual name “*senbon matsu*” (thousand pines) refers to an

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<sup>118</sup> Payne 2010:80

<sup>119</sup> Mack 1994:145

<sup>120</sup> Braw, Holmberg & Myrdal 2011:8

<sup>121</sup> Mack 1994:145

<sup>122</sup> Payne 2010:81

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.,p.81

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.,p.81

<sup>125</sup> Louis & Ito 2007: 66

<sup>126</sup> Braw, Holmberg & Myrdal 2011:121

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.,p.121

<sup>128</sup> Trotzig 1911:19

<sup>129</sup> A kakemono is a Japanese scroll painting or calligraphy

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.,p.19- 21

undisturbed happiness, or “*yoruzuya*” (longevity), which means a desire that the participants may enjoy both success and happiness in their lives. The tea whisk reminds of the sun's rays and symbolizes the light, life. The tea tin is called “*omoi gawa*” (deep river) and also “*miyagi-no*” which is the name for a province in Japan that is very famous for its fair autumn flowers. The teacup is called the “honored guest” or “standing stork”, etc. Trotzig (1911) wrote that you can trace allusions and content of the nature and religion which urges to seek wisdom and truth<sup>131</sup>. In the tea ceremony you can find ancient Chinese philosophical doctrine and dualism as well as the male and female principle<sup>132</sup> of the Taoism Yin and Yang. The study of these opposites form together a harmonious unit where strong, powerful forms appear next to the weak and fragile and to produce contrast<sup>133</sup>.

## 4.6 Metal arts function and symbolism

Japanese exhibitions commonly feature metal art in various forms such as Japanese swords, sword guard and helmets. The making of the Japanese swords as well as their symbolical meanings are a complex matter, and you need knowledge to understand the Japanese culture to do this properly. The intangible cultural as well as the tangible cultural heritage go hand in hand in these swords and cannot be separated, hence the safeguarding lies in these two aspects.

### Katana

The very tradition of Japanese sword making is generally seen as having begun after the seventh century. Tazawa (1981) explains that the craft of sword making appears to have come to Japan from Korea and China, along with the technique of using bellows to smelt iron<sup>134</sup>. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of Japanese sword making is the fact that what is essentially a weapon is transformed into a beautiful art object<sup>135</sup>. During the Heian period the craft of Japanese sword making made rapid progress so that the quality of Japanese blades was, arguably, unsurpassed<sup>136</sup>. The most famous Japanese swords are the *katana* or *uchigatana* which are long, curved, one bladed sword which began to be used more extensively sometime after the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A very interesting detail is that the most commonly used term *katana* is incorrectly used, according to Louise and Ito (2007), when speaking about Japanese long sword in general. The sword is called *katana* if it's worn inserted in the *obi* (belt) with the edge up. If the sword hangs down from the belt with straps it is called *tachi*<sup>137</sup>. *Katana* was the real status symbol a samurai could own. A good sword was expensive to produce and also an art object and very often was these swords handed down from generations in the same family. The Samurai developed strict regulations on, amongst others, how to handle the swords that came to be known as *bushidō*<sup>138</sup> “the way of the warrior”. The myth of creation of these swords, where the legends has it, the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami gave her grandchild, the Emperor, a sword, jewels and a mirror; all three are seen as sacred treasures. The sword became a symbol of obedience, honour, soul, and fighting spirit of the samurai and there are many stories of the mystic qualities of individual swords<sup>139</sup>. Shintoism made the forging of swords a sacred act, which gave the swordsmith a high status among craftsmen and before the work began with the forging of the swords, he would wash himself carefully and put on specially chosen white clothing. The result is one of the sharpest steel weapons in the world<sup>140</sup>. The manufacturing of the *katana* is very complicated and a tedious process and the different steps required different craftsmen, especially when the blade was forged over several days and was seen as a sacred art. The forging of a sword was a respected work that was as much a religious as a craftsmanship profession. The acquisition of a sword was part of the samurais coming of age ceremony, and carrying two swords during the Edo period were a samurai prerogative:

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.,p.21

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.,p.21

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.,p.22

<sup>134</sup> Tazawa 1981:157

<sup>135</sup> Not only specifically for Japan

<sup>136</sup> Tazawa 1981: 158

<sup>137</sup> Louise & Ito 2007:130

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.,p,131

<sup>139</sup> Braw, Holmberg & Myrdal 2011:89

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.,p.89

*katana* and *wakizashi* which together were called *daishō* (“long and short”). *Katanas* was used in open conflict while *wakizashi* with its shorter blades was used as a complementary stabbing tool in close combats. The first known record use of the sword *wakizashi* was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This sword is similar to its big brother *katana* but is remarkably smaller and thinner. This small sword fulfilled another important function of the samurai; *wakizashi* was used when a samurai was forced to committed *seppuku*, ritual suicide<sup>141</sup>, when he, for example had dishonored himself. A way to restore his honor was then to commit *seppuku*.

### **Tsuba**

The adoption of *katana* during the Muromachi period (1333-1573) was accompanied by corresponding changes in sword ornamentation and various accessories were developed such as; sword guards (*tsuba*), small knives called (*kozuka*), and metal rods (*kōgai*) all attached to the sword sheath<sup>142</sup>. *Tsuba* or the sword guard separated the blade from the hilt, and also gave balance to the sword. *Tsubas* also had two holes and were used for the *kogai* “hairpin” and for a small knife called “*kogatana*”, the latter one could be used as a “calling card” in battle when the victor plunged the *kogatana* into the dead body of his fallen enemy so everyone would know who did it<sup>143</sup>. The *tsuba* itself is considered an art object and a highly desirable collectible, in for example the Western world. Through its association with the samurais for centuries the *tsuba* became the bearer of extensive processing and decorating which on very small areas combined highly artistic and technical qualities. The decor depicts a whole world, a microcosm, everything between heaven and earth with mythological people, figures, animal and plants as well as everyday object. Often the messages and signs are hidden to outsiders.

### **Kabuto**

During war-time it was important for samurais to look as terrifying as possible and especially the helmets were designed with a lot of imagination<sup>144</sup>. A way for the samurai to attract attention on the battlefield was to wear stunning, special-made helmets, and some popular ornaments could be theater masks, peacock feathers and buffalo horns<sup>145</sup>. *Kabuto* (meaning helmet) was the most striking part of the samurai armour and served as both protection and a status symbol. In *Hagakura* it is written that “decoration of the armour is unnecessary, but you should be very careful how the helmet looks. It comes with the warrior's head to the enemy camp”<sup>146</sup>. Rich samurai wore *kabuto* made of gilded copper. The *kabuto* consisted of many parts and each helmet was unique and many were specially manufactured for one specific person<sup>147</sup>.

## **4.7 Analysis of Japanese art history and symbolism**

In this chapter key aspects of Japanese art history and symbolism have been presented. Japanese culture has a complex symbolic system imbedded in their objects of everyday life. Within this framework we find everything from art, philosophy to history, all emerged from the interweaving of Shintoism, Confucianism, (Zen) Buddhism and Taoism. This is not unique for Japan, but a reminder of the importance to know the objects intangible heritage. These objects shape together with other objects, “a web of significance”, and where meaning(s) lie in the people who share the same understanding for what these symbols represent. When symbols with great meaning are taken out of their original context and relationships they may lose their fundamental meaning and are assigned new ones in its new context.

Every object has two sides, its tangible form and its meaning(s), which together represent a holistic whole. Symbolism is the practice of representing objects through symbols, and the symbols function is

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<sup>141</sup> Louise & Ito 2007:138

<sup>142</sup> Tazawa 1981:579

<sup>143</sup> Braw, Holmberg & Myrdal 2011:95

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.,p.99

<sup>145</sup> Louise & Ito 2007:74

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.,p.94

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.,p.96

for the observed to understand what the symbol indirectly conveys.

The symbolism found in Nô masks, Chadô and metal art represent a part of Japanese culture and belief systems and the interpretations of these may be different due to individuals' prior experience and understanding. These symbols do relate to the different belief systems that explains how to act and behave in specific contexts, for example in tea ceremony.

Museums play an important role in the matter of interpretation; as action and decisions in the museum process creates a symbolic meaning(s) of these objects which communicates, for example, out in exhibition halls.

Incorporations of different voices, multivocality, into different exhibitions are something many museums work with that create nuances. These nuances can be read and interpreted in various ways depending on, for instance the pre-understanding of those who visits the exhibition.

One important thing to have in mind is that there isn't just one truth or one understanding of these objects. A quality exhibition should be readable in many different ways depending on, for example, the viewer standing and watching and/ or interacting with it. If there is someone who is very interested in textiles the exhibition should be readable from their point of interests as well, while others might want to know more about the objects way into the museums. It requires many variations of stories in one single exhibition.

Geertz's way of seeing culture through a semiotic perspective has strengthened the notion that an objects symbolical meaning cannot be separated from the process of social integration and the need to have a thorough understanding for semiotics of different cultures. When objects are separated from their originated context and, for instance, put in an exhibition context it is important that the museum underpins their exhibition with a thick description; explaining the context as well.

Whenever objects are separated and end up, for instance in Western museums, the likelihood is that the distribution of knowledge concerning these objects is unstable and uneven. Over time as the social distance between the producer and consumer widens, the knowledge decreases as well. Japanese cultural heritage, as with many others, communicates a range of different meanings depending on which context they are placed. For example, they can be seen as performing tools, historical objects or art works. All of these are equally important in the preservation of their ICH. And all require an understanding of the traditions associated with them.

To work effectively with collections ICH there must be a solid base of knowledge to nuance and build multifaceted exhibitions. Japan has a rich culture and a complicated symbolic system that has characterized Japanese society, without any knowledge of their culture and society, and how it has influenced their art thus the importance this have/ had makes it difficult to talk about a preservation.

In the next chapter I compare how two museums with different profiles have chosen to interpret their Japanese exhibitions and the knowledge they have about these. I will also explore their knowledge about the UNESCO Convention (2003) and if the two museums have followed ICOMs guidelines in their work in safeguarding of their Japanese collections ICH. I will also assess to what extent they show knowledge and understanding of the associated symbolism and significance.

## 5. ILLUSTRATED EXAMPLES- JAPANESE OBJECTS IN TWO SWEDISH MUSEUMS

In this chapter, I present two illustrated examples, the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm and Röhsska museum in Gothenburg, in order to examine how they have worked with the ICOM guidelines and UNESCO Convention (2003). I assessed whether these were followed, and to what extent, when it came to the preservation of their Japanese collections ICH, I also assessed their knowledge of the symbolism and meaning(s) of these aspects.

These two illustrated examples have different approaches, an ethnographic and a design approach. I have focused on their Japanese exhibitions and particularly three specific aspects of display; Metal art, Nô masks and Tea ceremony.

I have conducted 3 semi- structured, recorded interviews with the Exhibition curator at Röhsska museum and the former Asia curator at the Ethnographic Museums and the Japanese curator at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities. I used a questionnaire<sup>148</sup> and each interview took about 1 to 3 hours to conduct. These curators have been chosen because of their knowledge about their Japanese exhibition and how their museums worked with their museum collections ICH. However, it takes skills to administer a questionnaire without subtly telling the interviewees how they should answer the questions. My findings in this chapter are solely based on three interviews which contents might be biased with the interviewer or the interviewee's personal opinions. The facts revealed in the interviews are also restricted to respective museum. In this chapter I present the parts that are relevant to this enquiry. Since the interviews were in Swedish, I have translated the parts presented in this thesis into English.

I have also documented the exhibitions and examined how the museums presented the chosen parts of the exhibitions in terms of their databases, catalogue cards and pictures.

### 5.1 Röhsska museum and the Ethnographic museum

To clarify my results I will present my objectives first and then analyze how each museum position itself in regards to those objectives.

#### 5.1.1 UNESCO Convention and ICOM guidelines

Research objective: Examine the knowledge and awareness of the UNESCOs Convention of Safeguarding ICH (2003) in Röhsska museum and the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm and assess how consistent their practice was with the guidelines of ICOM and the Convention.

#### *Result and analysis*

While interviewing my informants it became clear that both museums are members of ICOM, and all of my informants were aware of the UNESCO Convention of Safeguarding of ICH (2003), but neither the former Asia curator nor Japanese curator were aware of the ICOM guidelines. When I asked the Exhibition curator about ICOM guidelines he stated;

I am aware of that. However, I can't say that we are working accordingly. ICOM has many different types of guidelines, and we have especially worked to implement ICOMs recommendations concerning trades of antiquities and how to respond to materials from endangered animals. ICOM recommendations are presented or quoted in the museum's policy documents, in terms of both exhibitions and acquisitions. On the other hand we don't quote anything about intangible cultural values or about cultural heritage in any of our policy documents as far as I know<sup>149</sup>.

He continued to say that they didn't have any staff education or training relating to the convention or at least not during his four years working in the museum. According to the Exhibition curator this is because that their museum is an art museum and not a museum of cultural history. He also explained

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<sup>148</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>149</sup> The Exhibition curator; Röhsska museum in Gothenburg. 2015. Interview. March 19

that they collect documentation about artist that has created the objects in addition to collecting material culture. In some cases they also document who the previous owners were, where the object (mainly interiors) was found and where the furniture stood before, and in what context etc. He emphasized that it didn't mean that they're not interested in the objects connection to their previous social contexts etc., but that was not the focus of their museum. He stated that "We who work with acquisitions, for example, we keep ourselves updated about the recommendations relating to trading of objects or endangered animals /.../<sup>150</sup>".

Both the former Asia curator and the Japanese curator agreed that even though their museums are ICOM members they are both very doubtful that it is an active membership; however are they aware of ICOMs resolutions which have been communicated to the personnel. The former Asia curator explained further:

There is a Swedish UNESCO advice, but we have never had any use of them. They also write and translate some of the resolutions and spread them so that they become known in Sweden, and it ought to play a major role in our museums, but I have a feeling that they don't<sup>151</sup>.

The similarities between the two museums are that there aren't any quotes in any of their policy documents regarding the convention or ICOM guidelines, and that both museums write their own steering documents. The Japanese curator pointed out that they don't work so much with intangible cultural values on the museum. The policy is that their knowledge should be on their databases and search folders, but as both agreed upon that it is a quite laborious work to add knowledge into their database.

The Exhibition curator explained that their museum was not a museum of cultural history but an art museum and therefore worked different with their collection. He stressed that they're not indifferent to it but that's not what they prioritize, which he again is related to what type of museum they we're. The curators at the museum of Far Eastern Antiquities and the Ethnographic museum on the other hand had never heard of ICOM guidelines and naturally couldn't work accordingly. The Japanese curator explained that she would like to know more about ICOM but felt that ICOM was hard to navigate around and that meant that museums were both slow moving and stressful at the same time. The Asia curator said.

I can say one thing with respect to this document, and that is that the government agency<sup>152</sup> itself has had a long series of annual meetings that has tried to come up with similar policy document and put down the cause of why we exist and these kinds of things. But we have to my knowledge never had any background documents from ICOM to assume from, but we have tried to work out our own righteousness and opportunities of what we are bad and good at<sup>153</sup>.

As for as staff education the Japanese curator at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities was unsure of how things worked now for new employees and how they are introduced into the government agency, since they have worked in the organization for many years.

After having interviewed them there is a shared view that their government agency has other priorities.

### **5.1.2 Conventions five key areas**

Research objective: Assess which intangible values from the conventions' five key areas are taken into account in Röhsska and the Ethnographic museum

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<sup>150</sup> The Exhibition curator; Röhsska museum in Gothenburg. 2015. Interview. March 19

<sup>151</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>152</sup> The National Museums of World Culture (= World Culture Museums/Världskulturmuseerna) is a Government agency under the Ministry of Culture

<sup>153</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

## ***Result and analysis***

When I interviewed the Exhibition curator at Röhsska museum he explained:

When the museum contextualizes the objects it is based on an aesthetic eye, we are interested in how they are made, and what materials or technologies that have been used and by the function they had. And function may of course be understood as both a practical use function and as a social or symbolic function. And many objects, if you take netsuke<sup>154</sup> in the Japanese collection for example. They have a practical function of a kimono, but the way that they have been made, they have become objects of art that gave them a symbolic, a social function, and the motifs in itself has also a symbolic meaning. So it is all related<sup>155</sup>.

The Exhibition curator further explained that the ways in which the objects has been collected and exhibited in the museum was often from an aesthetic expression related to materials and manufacturing. He stressed that it is the history of the collections that's important to tell rather than, for example how the objects once appeared in its authentic environment in Japan. According to the Exhibition curator this is the reason why they have Japanese objects as in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a notion that the entire art industry and craftsmanship in Europe was in a period of decline. Röhsska museum started to gaze at other countries and thought that they had a whole different quality and expression; they were working with materials in an authentic way instead of imitating material which was a common practice in Europe during this time. When it came to their interpretation of their Japanese collection he argues:

These collections are objects of other countries, but these are also collections that tell us about how these objects was dedicated or how they were perceived and appreciated in our countries and how these affect our own art history. And then again, I think that our museum is very different from, above all, an ethnographic museum. Here, as we see the collections today and what we feel is most interesting is what impressions these objects have made in our art history<sup>156</sup>.

According to the former Asia curator their government agency have not been so good at collecting ICH with oral traditions and such, the main thing to collect has been the more tangible heritage. When they built their Japanese exhibition they wanted to play with the ambiguity of the image of Japan; photographs and the mental image of Japan. The former Asia curator explained:

When building this exhibition we had to come up with three small scenes that were images of Japan, and earlier I have had opportunities to travel around Japan properly and they have many Japanese museums, and it turned out that the images reflected in our collections are the images that Japanese museums expose of themselves. And those are the images of Japan that the Japanese cultural organizations like to send out; tea, martial arts and nô theatre<sup>157</sup>.

The former Asia curator thought it was a struggle to work with the making of the Japanese exhibition since the exhibitor didn't want to exhibit too many objects in order to make the exhibition more aesthetically pleasing. The former Asian curator on the other hand wanted more materials so there were able to tell the narratives. He thought that the Japanese exhibition became quite fastidious in the end with no text inside the displays; they solved it by putting the text on tables in front of the displays that related directly to the different exhibition sections, which he thought worked out well. If he could he would like to add a small Nô theatre so visitors could listen to the Nô theatre since it's not easy to convey the special metallic sounds from Nô drums or how the Nô theatre once were used and how it has become institutionalized today. Nô theatre itself, he argued, is in a closed room with different positions, with different columns that belongs to different actor types etc. "it is so depleted and not what you might imagine a play to be and that is very exciting to try to convey, but very difficult to point at"<sup>158</sup>. In connection to their Japanese exhibition they have a Japanese teahouse that is visible from the museum. He explains that their tea house, called Zui- Ki- Tei, has many remarkable

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<sup>154</sup> Netsukes are a type of buttons

<sup>155</sup> The Exhibition curator; Röhsska museum in Gothenburg. 2015. Interview. March 19

<sup>156</sup> The Exhibition curator; Röhsska museum in Gothenburg. 2015. Interview. March 19

<sup>157</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>158</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

construction details, material uses, copper work and other things that has to be done in a particular way and soon the tea house must undergo a reparation. The museum has arranged to bring in experts from Japan to do the work since there is no one in Sweden that can do it. A few times per season they conduct tea ceremony. “It requires of course that there is a working tea association and that is nothing that the museum itself is capable of, today there is a tea association that seems to be well-functioning<sup>159</sup>”. When I asked him if it is difficult to work with the intangible in an exhibition he said;

Some are suitable for it and others are not. The collection didn’t arrive to the museum with the UNESCO Convention in mind, and it is not always easy to complete our collection with such content we would like them to have<sup>160</sup>.

It became evident that neither of the museums made their Japanese exhibition with the conventions five key areas in mind, but none the less it is clear that both have at least one or several aspect each of the convention five key domains. Röhsska museum contextualized the objects based on an aesthetic eye and were interested in how the objects were made, what materials, technology and function they had. The UNESCO Convention, article 2.2 (e)<sup>161</sup> are mainly concerned with in particular knowledge and skills involved in the process of craftsmanship, rather than the product itself. Even though Röhsska museum strongly assumed from the objects they still had the intangible aspect present in their exhibition in terms of how the objects were made that is a part of the safeguarding of ICH. Other goals of the convention (2.2 e) are to provide with livelihood to artists and increase the creativity. Although Röhsska museum don’t have the possibilities to provide this to artists their exhibition functioned as inspirations for artists all around the world that in a way created knowledge transfer that kept the collection alive in accordance to the conventions desires. The Ethnographic museum has different approach.

Excerpt from National Museum of Worlds Cultures mission statement:

The task of the agency is evident from the Swedish Code of Statutes instruction SFS 2007:1185 and Annual Appropriation Directions. The instruction states that the National Museums of World Culture is responsible for displaying and bringing to life the various cultures of our world, in particular cultures outside of Sweden. Furthermore, the agency is to document and illustrate different cultural manifestations and conditions as well as cultural encounters and variations from a historical, contemporary, national and international perspective. Finally, the agency shall promote interdisciplinary knowledge and various forms of public activities<sup>162</sup>

The Ethnographic museums Japanese exhibition focuses on human, symbolic drama, masks, usage and meanings<sup>163</sup>. In the UNESCO Convention article 2.2 (b) *Performing arts*<sup>164</sup> are theatre mentioned as one intangible aspect thus performing arts such as objects, costume, mask, musical instruments and other body decoration used in, for example theatre included. Most of the attributes in Nô theatre are seen in their exhibition, the convention states that measures for safeguarding performing arts should focus on transmission of knowledge and techniques and emphasizes that performance may be researched, archives, inventoried, recorded and documented. In the Ethnographic museums Japanese exhibition, they have focused on research; archive and documentation that can be seen as a way of safeguard and convey Nô drama for visitors. Furthermore they have according to article 2.2 (c) *Ritual and festive events*<sup>165</sup> their tea house that is actively used for tea ceremonies that is a significant part in Japanese culture and society. The Ethnographic museums conduct education and practice of this ritual and thus encourage public participation that keeps this aspect of ICH alive in line with the convention.

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<sup>159</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>160</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>161</sup> See page 17

<sup>162</sup> <http://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/the-government/the-national-museum-of-world-cultures/>

<sup>163</sup> Idé- document. Japanese exhibition. The Ethnographic museum in Stockholm (2009)

<sup>164</sup> See page 16

<sup>165</sup> See page 17



### 5.1.3 Knowledge, collaboration and intangible qualities

Research objective; Assess the level of knowledge Röhsska museum and the Ethnographic museum have about their Japanese object through analyzing archives, databases, exhibition and to identify if there are personnel with particular knowledge of Japanese cultural heritage.

Research objective; Assess if the museums have any education programs in connection to their Japanese exhibition/ collaboration with other museum bodies in Japan

Research objective; Explore the intangible qualities of Japanese objects within western museum collections through critically analyzing literature associated with main belief system in Japanese cultural traditions

#### **Result and analysis**

In this section I will show examples of three exhibition parts of Röhsska and the Ethnographic museums Japanese exhibitions, "Nô masks" "Metal arts" and "Tea ceremony". I will first present Röhsska museums exhibition parts and analyze the findings and then present the Ethnographic museums three exhibition parts and analyze the findings before I do an overall analysis.

I chose these parts when I after field studies at the Ethnographic museum and an internship at Röhsska-museum noticed that these museums with different approaches used three similar aspects of display. I thought it would be interesting to assess their level of knowledge about these exhibited objects through analyzing their exhibitions, databases and archives.

#### **Result**

*Röhsska museum three exhibition sections;*

##### **Nô masks**



1. Nô masks

On the black wall to the left of the first Nô mask on the image, you can read;

Nô pieces performed on stage  
the dancer gives life to the mask  
afterwards just a mask  
Kyoshi Takahama (1874-1959)<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Authors translation, original text;  
"Nô stycket framförs på scenen  
dansaren ger liv åt masken  
efteråt bara en mask"  
Kyoshi Takahama (1874-1959)"

In the respective showcases, there was a small exhibition text that corresponded to the text in the black booklets that was deployed at the exhibition part Tsuba, for example, in booth No. 1;

1. No-mask, Naki-Masu

Wood, painted

Edo period (1603-1867)

19<sup>th</sup> century

RKM 13-1972

The mask symbolizes the moods of the one who acts in the dance drama No.<sup>167</sup>

2. No-mask, Ko- Omote

Wood, painted

Edo period (1603- 1867)

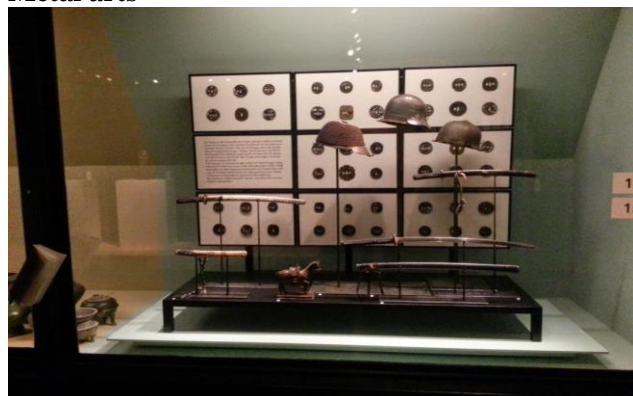
19<sup>th</sup> century

RKM 12-1972

The mask symbolizes the moods of the one who acts in the dance drama No.<sup>168</sup>

In addition to the sculpture that stood next to the last stand at the right side, this exhibition section was blank on other impressions; there was no other information to read about these Nô masks in excess of the information already reported.

## Metal arts



2. Tsubas, katanas, sheaths, helmets and a small statue of a horse, to the right of the display case you can see a small information booklet hang

This exhibition section consisted of 3\*3 wall plates with 6 different tsubas, except from the one where there was a small information text that said;

Tsuba is the sword guard which forms the border between the swords blade and handle. The primary function is to balance the sword and prevent the hand from reaching the blade and to protect from an attacker's blow. In the tsuba there is, besides the hole for the blade, also an opening for a small knife, Kodzuka and sometimes even a hole for the kogai which the samurai used to arrange his hair. From the beginning the design was simple and the emphasis was primarily on the function, but during the Edo period (1603-1868) a demand for luxury items was

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<sup>167</sup> Authors translation, original text;

"No-mask, Naki-Masu

Trä, bemålat

Edo perioden (1603-1867)

1800- tal

RKM 13-1972

"Masken symboliserar sinnesstämningar hos den agerande i dansdramat No"

<sup>168</sup> Authors translation, original text;

"No-mask, Ko- Omote

Trä, bemålat

Edo period (1603- 1867)

1800-tal

RKM 12- 1972

"Masken symboliserar sinnesstämningar hos den agerande i dansdramat No"

created and tsukas increasingly became an artistic decoration and a status symbol that primarily communicated the owner's social status. Towards the end of the 1800s the tsuba became popular as collectibles in the West<sup>169</sup>

In front of the wall tiles they have mounted three helmets that were made at different time periods, they have also exhibited a little sculpture of a horse and katanas, sheaths and a small knife called kodzuka. The exhibition text had not been translated into English, this information was only available to read in Swedish. There was a small information booklet that hung on the side (left) of the show case where you could read what material the different tsukas were made of, where it was manufactured and together with the artist's name if available. There was also information about the objects inventory number and to some extent from which collection these were taken from. The inventory number was only intended for internal use so that staff knew which items were on display, but it could also be helpful if a visitor, for example would like to know more about a specific object. In that case the staff could provide with more information if necessary with the help from the numbers. The information was similar for all the objects included in this exhibition part, for example

Dagger with sheath  
Wrought iron, gold lacquer  
1800s first half  
RKM 4-1953<sup>170</sup>

This information was also available to read in English and was the only information that can be read in a language other than Swedish.

### Tea ceremony



This exhibition section consisted of a small showcase that had been placed on a table (at the height of the shin bone) and shared this table space with another exhibition part that I will not be discussing in this text.

At the short side of this table the museum had placed a wall, about the same width, which had a black background. On this wall stood a small text;

A monk drinks his morning tea  
it is still

<sup>169</sup> This is the authors translation, the original text is in Swedish "En Tsuba är den parerplåt som bildar gränsen mellan svärdets blad och handtag. Den primära funktionen är att balansera svärdet, hindra handen från att nå klingan samt att skydda från en angripares hugg. I Tsuban finns förutom ett hål för knivbladet också en öppning för en liten kniv, Kodzuka och ibland även ett hål för den kogai samurajen använde för att arrangera sitt hår. Från början var formgivningen enkel och betoningen lades främst på funktionen men under Edo perioden (1603-1868) skapades en efterfrågan på lyxföremål och Tsubas blev alltmer en konstfull dekoration och statussymbol som i första hand kommunicerade ägarens sociala ställning. Mot slutet av 1800- talet blev Tsubas populära som samlarobjekt i västvärlden"

<sup>170</sup> Authors translation, original text;

"Dolk med slida  
Smidesjärn, guldlack  
1800-talets första hälft  
RKM 4-1953"

Chrysanthemums bloom  
Matsuo Basho (1644-1694)<sup>171</sup>

Next to the showcase (see photo No. 3) on the table, stood a little damaged information text for this exhibition part.

The Japanese tea ceremony is a ceremony intended to create peace and harmony in addition to enclosed spaces. It was developed during the 1500s to a ritual with fixed rules. The tea ceremony has determined utensils. The tea bowl is one of them. In addition to its utility function the tea bowl has an aesthetic task. It will be viewed and its beauty praised and commented by the guests - The raku fired tea bowls respond well to their demands.<sup>172</sup>

In the showcase there were deployed eight pieces of objects (there should be 9 objects found, but the third object, a water kettle was at the time placed in a different location). Under each object was a small informational text about the different objects etc. For example;

Bowl, Chawan  
Earthenware, glazed  
17<sup>th</sup> century  
RKM 531-1911<sup>173</sup>

You could read the Japanese word (written in an alphabet called Romanji in Japanese) for the various objects after the Swedish one.

### Analysis

In the exhibition section "Nô mask" the information in the exhibition text didn't differ much from the catalogue cards or their database. The main differences between them were that the length and width of the various objects were written on the catalogue cards/ database, and who sold/ donated them to the museum and nothing about the masks significance or functions etc. In the exhibition "tea ceremony" you could find more information about certain exhibited objects in the catalogue cards and Museum Plus. One such object was the water kettle;

A Tetsubin<sup>174</sup> is a heavy kettle of iron, originally intended to be used to boil water directly on the stove and not to brew tea. Gradually the Tetsubin became to be a brewing vessel. Then the kettle was glazed or enameled on the inside to protect against rust<sup>175 176</sup>.

There were also two other objects, the tea bowls "chantan" and "chawan" that were the only objects in this section that you couldn't find any information in their catalogue cards (these objects weren't at the

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<sup>171</sup> Authors translation, original text;

*"En munk dricker sitt morgonte  
det är stilla*

*Chrysantemens blomning"*

*Matsuo Basho (1644-1694)*

<sup>172</sup> Authors translation, original text;

*"Den japanska teceremonin är en ceremoni avsedd att skapa lugn och harmoni i därtill avskilda utrymmen. Den utvecklades under 1500- talet till en ritual med bestämda regler. Till teceremonin hör bestämda utensilier. Teskålen är en av dem. Utöver sin nyttofunktion har teskålen en estetisk uppgift. Den ska beskådas och dess skönhet prisas och kommenteras av gästerna - De rakubrända teskålarna svarar väl mot deras krav"*

<sup>173</sup> Authors translation, original text;

*"Skål, Chawan*

*Lergods, glaserad*

*1600-tal*

*RKM 531-191*

<sup>174</sup> Tetsubin is the Japanese name for water kettle

<sup>175</sup> Museum Plus, RKM 265-1906

2014-05-12

<sup>176</sup> Authors translation, original text;

*"En tetsubin<sup>176</sup> är en tung kanna av järn, ursprungligen tänkt att användas för att koka upp vatten direkt på spisen och inte för att brygga te. Efterhand övergick tetsubin till att i stället bli ett bryggkärl. Då glaserades eller emaljerades de på insidan för att skydda mot rost"*

time registered in their database) or Museum Plus that they were used in tea ceremony. Furthermore, they lacked information regarding the little wall text that was written on the black wall which is a so called "Haiku". Haiku is a poem in mini format according to Japanese patterns and is a special kind of art form that would benefit to be explained to visitors. In the exhibition section "Metal arts" there were about as much information in the catalogue cards as in the exhibition text about the tsukas. In the Museum Plus it was also a generic text (same for all) of the tsukas written and added by the museums ethnologist and researcher (referenced included), but nothing about the individual tsukas symbolical meaning. Regarding the helmets, swords and the sheaths there wasn't much information to come by in Museum Plus but more information to retrieve in the scanned catalogue cards.

When I did my research, I observed that the information in Museum Plus is the information that is written on the catalogue cards. Occasionally there was more information to retrieve from the database. I also discovered two faults in this exhibition part "Metal arts". The first one was the horse that was deployed; it didn't have the right inventory number printed. The inventory number was for the water kettle (RKM 264-1906) that had been removed from the exhibition part "Tea ceremony". After some research of the catalogue cards I found the horse, and the correct inventory number is RKM 791-1906. The second fault I noticed was text about the helmets. With the exhibition text is also the Japanese word for helmet, but it is misspelled. They have written "Kabut" but the right is "Kabuto". It is not only in the exhibition text that the Japanese word for helmet is misspelled but also in the catalogue cards, so naturally a mistake has occurred. This investigation has shown that there were a few flaws in the three exhibition parts. There were objects in every exhibition whose information you couldn't retrieve directly from their database Museum Plus. Instead you had to go to the scanned catalogue cards or the hands-on catalogue cards that are available in large fireproof file cabinets. Furthermore Röhsska Museum had not been consistent with the years. In the Nô mask exhibition text you could read that the Edo period lasted between the years 1603- 1867, while in the tsuka section (stood on opposite side to the Nô masks) stated that the Edo period lasted between the years 1603-1868. I have tried to find the "right" years when searched online and most common dates to find is that the period lasted until 1868. Another discovery is that the museum had made a mistake when it comes to the Japanese word "Chantan". The word "Chantan" does not exist in the Japanese language, but will most certainly be "Chawan". I searched a lot on the net and online Japanese dictionary<sup>177</sup> and found nothing that could support this. My theory is that it most likely has been a misunderstanding when this was written over a hundred years ago and that the correct term should be "Chawan". The Exhibition curator explained in regards to the misspelling and the information:

It is quite true that the information has been very succinct and you can find inaccuracies in concepts and words, and that is linked to when these objects were collected and the knowledge of them were limited. /.../ now we digitalize the object catalogue where it is important that the documentation found in the old catalogue cards is transferred into the new. However, we have only limited opportunities to control and modify the existing information, and the old inaccuracies are transferred because we lack the detailed knowledge<sup>178</sup>.

The museum, according to the Exhibition curator, doesn't have any true expertise. He argues that museum on the continent are much bigger and that they have their own departments, like for example the Asia departments, which in turn is divided up in smaller section that have staff which is specialized on paper and another one on wood etc.

It's a whole other world compared to our small municipal museum, if you look at our collection and individual object we have much of international standards. However, the way in which our museum is run financially doesn't really correspond to the international standards. As a municipal museum we don't have the possibilities to have an international standard in regards to research of collections, unfortunately<sup>179</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> <http://jisho.org/>

<sup>178</sup> The Exhibition curator; Röhsska museum in Gothenburg. 2015. Interview. March 19

<sup>179</sup> The Exhibition curator; Röhsska museum in Gothenburg. 2015. Interview. March 19

When the Japanese exhibition still existed<sup>180</sup>, the Exhibition curator explained that the pedagogues used the exhibition for different activities. They had public tours, and for a period they also had drawing classes for schoolchildren where they discussed manga<sup>181</sup> and how to draw it in the exhibition hall. The museum doesn't have any collaboration with other museum bodies in Japan, and that depends partly on that the museum do not have enough finances to let some of the staff travel and establish contacts.

## Result

### *The Ethnographic museum's Japanese exhibition*



3. To the left, pictures of Japan, in the front a small image of a Japanese mansion, right behind Nô drama, in the middle Samurai/ Metal in the right Tea ceremony and in the opposite side of the photographs, Ainu<sup>182</sup>

### *The Ethnographic Museums three exhibition sections:*



4. Nô masks, Metal art and Tea ceremony

## Nô masks



5. Japan- Nô

<sup>180</sup> the exhibition was dismantled in the summer of 2014 in connection to a rebuilding

<sup>181</sup> Manga is a Japanese form of comics

<sup>182</sup> Ainu is the name of the indigenous people of Japan



This exhibition section consists of 28<sup>183</sup> different pieces related to Nô drama where 14 pieces are of Nô masks of different characters. In front of the display is a table with the exhibition text since there is no text inside the display for aesthetical reasons.



6. Here is an overview of all text related to Nô



7. Information about the individual Nô masks

The exhibition text is designed so that you can read the Swedish text on the left side and the English version on the right side. After every small image you can read the Japanese name (in bold type) of the various images and shorter information first in Swedish and then in English. In the information text you can read about the Nô drama and its significance, and under every image of the Nô masks you can read about their names and what they represent<sup>184 185</sup>.

## Metal art



8. Japan- Samurai/ Metal arts

This section consists of 64<sup>186</sup> different pieces related to Samurai that contains of armor, swords, helmets and related artefacts.

<sup>183</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505958/REFERENCES/713>

<sup>184</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505958>

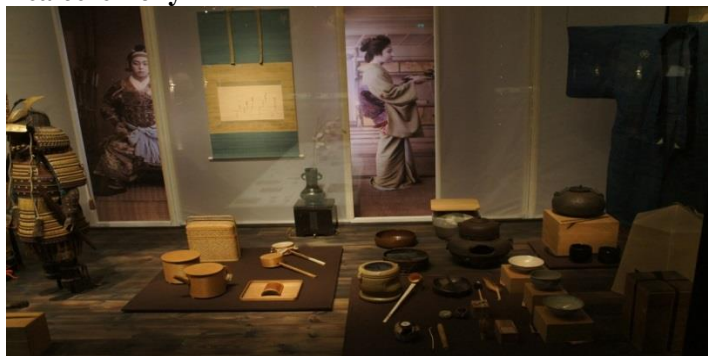
<sup>185</sup> To read the full exhibition text about Nô, see Appendix 2

<sup>186</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505959/REFERENCES/334>



There are no exhibition texts found inside this display either, but on table in front of the display you can read about these objects significance in both Swedish (left side) and English (right side) and beside the smaller images is their Japanese name (bold type) printed with shorter information in Swedish and English. The information that could be read in this section is about the Samurais and *bushidō* “the way of the warrior”, based on Buddhist etc. The exhibition text also describes the samurai armor which purpose is to serve as protection and to fright and impress. The text also describes the *katana*, the sword the samurai regarded as “his soul”<sup>187 188</sup>.

## Tea ceremony



9. Japan- Tea ceremony

This section consist of 93<sup>189</sup> different objects related to the tea ceremony with all necessary utensils you need in the summer as well as in the winter when performing this ceremony.



<sup>187</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505959>

<sup>188</sup> To read the full exhibition text about Samurais and bushidō, see Appendix 2

<sup>189</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505960/REFERENCES/713>



There are no exhibition texts found inside this display either, but on table in front of the display you can read about these objects significance in both Swedish (left side) and English (right side), and on the smaller images their Japanese name (bold type) are typed together with shorter information in Swedish and English. The information that could be read in this section is a short background of how the tea was introduced from China and its rapid advances made by Buddhism in Japan. The exhibition text also describes tea ceremony as a combination of aesthetic and social integration<sup>190 191</sup>.

### Analysis

In their database Carlotta you could find that this exhibition consists of 277<sup>192</sup> objects all together divided into two different folders. In one you could find the exhibition text written in both Swedish and English and in the other one the different exhibition sections and their particular objects.

The information found about the individual objects exhibited in the Nô section in their database Carlotta are mostly their inventory number, what country these were made, which collection these came from, what year/ century they were made, what year they were bought/ donated/ purchased and what material the different objects consists of thus what measurements has taken in regards to conserving the various objects. In one of the Nô mask registered in their database you can read a bit more about the Nô theatre but also some more information about why these masks are considered to be masterpieces and the history of these masks:

#### *Why this is a masterpiece*

No-masks are among the most sought after and treasured objects from Japan, exemplifying the long and unbroken tradition of Japanese crafts with its emphasis on maintaining minute high standards in every respect of making and using the objects. This mask is just one example from the collection. In accordance with the ethics adhered to in the Museum of Ethnography, they have generally not been repaired, only well taken care of, and remain as they were acquired in Kyoto. They are unusually early acquisitions of no-masks in Japan, just a decade after Japan opened up to foreign contacts<sup>193</sup>.

#### *History of the Object*

The collection of no-masks to which this particular item belongs originally formed a part of the so-called "Vanadis" collection that Hjalmar Stolpe amassed when he took part in the circumnavigation of 1883-1885 with the Swedish naval ship Vega. It belongs to a sub-collection brought together in Kyoto totalling more than 500 items. The Vanadis collection was added to the museum collections in 1887. (Virtual Collection of Masterpieces, <http://masterpieces.asemus.museum/Default.aspx>)<sup>194</sup>

It was the same for the objects exhibited in the museum section "Metal arts/ Samurai", in their database you could mainly find basic information about them. For one of the objects you could find that it was the famous armorer Kanemoto that forged the sword<sup>195</sup>. I didn't find any more information (except from the basic information) about the other exhibited objects (helmets and tsubas) ICH. When I assessed the museum section "Tea ceremony" it was the same thing there, and missing was the information about what the calligraphy on the kakemono meant. When I turned to their database to look this up I found what the inscription meant; "With moonlight at the window in the tea-room newly

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<sup>190</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505960>

<sup>191</sup> To read the full exhibition text about Tea ceremony, see Appendix 2

<sup>192</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505434>

2015-04-28

<sup>193</sup> Carlotta, inventory number: 1887.08.3367

2015-04-28

<sup>194</sup> Carlotta, inventory number: 1887.08.3367

2015-04-28

<sup>195</sup> Carlotta, inventory number: 1936.21.0132

2015-04-28

built let us enjoy the music of boiling water in the kettle<sup>196</sup>, you could also read who wrote it. This shows that the museum has done research on the subject and has the knowledge of its significance.

The Japanese curator explained that their government agency doesn't have enough documentation of their Japanese collections and that they seldom are given enough time to change that. The former Asia curator stressed that the documentation is done usually by building up the library so it doesn't meet the 1959's knowledge about things.

When it came to their database Carlotta they both agreed that the database is quite difficult to manage, they felt that there were a lot of obstacles to working with the system. According to the former Asia curator the information found in Carlotta very often faded information, and the information that was originally written in the catalogues is written by someone over a century ago, "so one must be aware that the information you have is not necessarily up to date and it is a huge job to do it right. But the objects on display are documented<sup>197</sup>". He explains that the text written for the exhibition are inserted into Carlotta but not particularly well looked after, "when you search information of objects in literatures and text it is that information that should end up in the exhibition documentation. But the documentation of the Japanese exhibition is sparse<sup>198</sup>". He clarifies;

The exhibition texts are the ones that are properly archived and it is well that I insisted that I wanted the text to be both in English and Swedish, which they didn't always had before, but I managed to get that in into the Japanese exhibition.

According to the former Asia curator the Japanese curator is the only "expert" on Japan at the government agency. He explained "Yes, if there would be something on Japan, I had to do it. And I was lucky that I have in other matters been to Japan almost every year for a few months before". The exhibition is used in educational purposes and especially their the tea house Zui- Ki- Tei that offers, in collaboration with the Tea association, private tea ceremonies in connection with corporate events, family celebrations or to experience traditional Japanese culture in a private circle and beginners' courses in the Japanese tea ceremony etc<sup>199</sup>. They also have collaborations with various martial arts association and archers that for a while had their shooting range next to the museum. In regards to external collaboration the former Asia curator explained;

The Japanese themselves have gone out into the world and very carefully documented where Japanese collections are and what their content is, and also offered assistance to museums to document their collections, and that is something that we should have benefitted from but never did. This museum has been a bit outside that stuff and don't ask me why, it is before my time<sup>200</sup>.

### **Analysis of both Röhsska and the Ethnographic museums exhibition sections Nô masks, Metal arts and Tea ceremony**

There is a profound difference when it comes to the knowledge stored about the two museums Japanese collections, but there are also similarities as well. The similarities are that neither of the museum have any collaboration with any museum bodies in Japan. Both have had staff members that had established contacts with Japan, but these contacts disappeared when the staff members left. Both museums have/had some sort of educational activities in connection to their Japanese exhibition, but it is more expressed in the Ethnographic museum since they have the Tea house that they operate in collaboration with the Tea association. When it comes to the documentation and literature associated with main belief systems in Japanese cultural traditions, both museums have published books that highlight certain Japanese collections. Röhsska has "*Japanese woodprint: from Röhsska museum*

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<sup>196</sup> Carlotta, inventory number 1935.30.0040A  
2015-04-28

<sup>197</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>198</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>199</sup> <http://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/etnografiskamuseet/program/japanska-tehuset/>

<sup>200</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

*collections*” (2012) written by Kerstin Lekholm<sup>201</sup> a now retired paper conservator and another book “*Japanese from Röhsska art museum collection*”<sup>202</sup> (1990) edited by Karin Assma. The Ethnographic museum have four books and those are “*The dreamt Japan*”<sup>203</sup> by Ulla Wagner (2009), “*Cha-no-yu Japanese Tea ceremony*”<sup>204</sup> (1994) written by Ida Trotzig, “*The Tea house Zui-Ki-Tei*”<sup>205</sup> (1996) edited by Christian Duke, and “*With the world in a bag, the collections way to the Ethnographic museum*”<sup>206</sup> (2002) edited by Wilhelm Östberg. All of these books are based in the respective museums Japanese collection. The books in the Ethnographic museum hold information related to Japanese main belief systems in Japanese cultural traditions, which are also reflected in their exhibition texts<sup>207</sup> unlike to the exhibition texts in Röhsska museum exhibition parts.

You could say that neither of the two museums have any experts, and that is partly true. The Ethnographic museum doesn't have any Japanese experts specifically in their institution, but there is one in the government agency that is supposed work in all four of the government museums. When it comes to their databases there are much more information to gain from the Ethnographic museum since they have their exhibition text inserted in their database, and basic information about their individual objects. Röhsska museum have basic information regarding the objects in their database. As far as I have seen the Ethnographic museum doesn't have any misspellings in their exhibition in contrast to Röhsska museum that had a few and the latter have been consistent with dates and such. In terms of how they have chosen to interpret and built their Japanese exhibition, they both had in common that the aesthetical would be in focus but that's where their similarities ends. Despite the few mistakes Röhsska Museum made there is a feeling that those who created the Japanese exhibition had little knowledge of Japan (language and culture) and who didn't react to the misspellings of the Japanese word for helmet or a made-up word for teacup, but naturally believes that the information written on the catalogue cards are correct and therefore might have committed an unconscious error. These faults could have several causes such as lacking knowledge about Japan in the museum, or lack of time and/ or resources. This is very unfortunate since they have a beautiful Japanese collection. The Ethnographic museum managed to build a stronger exhibition and also link it with their Tea house. They chose to put the text outside the display on small tables so the text wouldn't come in the way of the objects beauty. In my opinion the Ethnographic museum succeeded better in conveying the aesthetical expressions since they had arranged it in a way so the visitors could get a glimpse of how these were carried out with the possibilities to read more about them. The former Asia curator explained;

I wrote the texts entirely myself. I had previously done a lot of reading about Japan and seen a large number of Japanese museums and had a broad knowledge base which was needed to get started. And /.../ a curator must know where to find information, and I let the museum to purchase a lot of the literature I needed. I wrote the texts during my vacation before the exhibition and then polished them one month before the opening. For a writer of exhibition texts, the problem is most to shorten, concentrate, and ensure that the text is readable and fit together. I did some special reading on Nô theater / masks, which I also experienced down in Osaka, as well as the samurai history and tea ceremony (least on the last one). Most reading I did of Ainu, not least Ainu history, which is complex, and which I thought gave us a story that fitted into the Ethnographic Museum's repertoire. One thing with exhibitions and exhibition texts is that the knowledge presented in the texts must be backed up by

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<sup>201</sup> Authors translation, the original title is; Lekholm, Kerstin & Baagøe, Thomas (2012). *Japanska träsnitt: ur Röhsska museets samlingar*. Göteborg: Röhsska museet

<sup>202</sup> Authors translation, the original titel is; Röhsska konstslöjdmuseet (1990). *Japanskt ur Röhsska konstslöjdmuseets samlingar*. Göteborg: Museet

<sup>203</sup> Authors translation, the original title is; Wagner, Ulla (2009). *Det drömda Japan: Ida Trotzigs fotosamling från Meiji-tidens Japan*. Stockholm: Carlsson

<sup>204</sup> Authors translation, the original titel is; Trotzig, Ida, *Cha-no-yu: japanernas teceremoni*, 3. uppl., Folkens museum - etnografiska, Stockholm, 1994

<sup>205</sup> Authors translation, the original titel is; Duke, Christer (red.), *Tehuset Zui-Ki-Tei: Det löftesrika ljusets boning*, Folkens museum - etnografiska, Stockholm, 1996

<sup>206</sup> Authord transaltion, the original titel is; Östberg, Wilhelm (red.), *Med världen i kappsäcken: samlingarnas väg till Etnografiska museet*, Etnografiska museet, Stockholm, 2002

<sup>207</sup> See Appendix 2

much greater background knowledge. A curator or pedagogue, showing an exhibition, must be prepared for far more difficult questions than what the text conveys<sup>208</sup>.

He further explained that the individual objects were mainly described in the museum's old catalogues but he still had to check if the information were correct. He thought that the Nô masks were tricky but found good supporting literature and was already familiar with the large collection of Rietberg in Zürich. He also retrieved help from the big Kodansha Encyclopedia that he trusts, and consulted all exhibition catalogues he could get a hold of to compare the information written there. Finally he also translated all text into English.

When reading the exhibition text you get a feeling that the museum had done good research before the opening and as the former Asia curator also explained, "so must a curator or pedagogue have more knowledge about the exhibition when showing visitors so they can be prepared to answer the questions that follows<sup>209</sup>". In Röhsska museum answering follow up questions can be a difficult task when the only information available is the one presented along the exhibition.

### 5.1.4 Recommendation for the future

Research objective: Assess if there is a need to develop methods to better and more effectively work with preservation of the Japanese intangible cultural heritage in the selected museums

#### *Result and analysis*

According to the Exhibition curator at Röhsska museum, he reckoned that there is a need to develop methods to more effectively work with the preservation of Japanese ICH in the museum, but also in parts of their European collection. He explained that it gets a little difficult when it comes to objects from more remote countries, and where the knowledge of these in the museums are quite unsure. If he could he would like to invite a Japanese guest researcher for a longer period of time to look at the collection and make comparisons with which objects of a certain type has been collected in Japan and if it differs from the objects found in Röhsska museum. He recognized that they also need to go through and supplement as well as verify information on all sorts of objects in the museum.

The former Asia curator also thinks that there is a need, but he sees the financial problems as a big obstacle. He too would like for a Japanese guest researcher to come to assist them in documenting their collection because they would be able to document in a way that they couldn't. "We might even be able to get the objects names and the concepts around them written down in Japanese<sup>210</sup>". He further stated;

When it comes to the intangible, it is the stories and knowledge around it that we have here, which is based on, among other things, the Swedish management history. An object that comes into the museum changes its form so many times, depending on how you use it and what you use it for and who manages and where in the storage the objects end up. The objects content so to speak changes shape, and there is as constant adding in the identities which had nothing to do with the objects in its region of origin. Perhaps sitting on the lap of an old lady somewhere, insofar as we know it, it's fantastic fun knowledge to convey. It's been a little battle here, there is a tendency to a certain kind of research around this type of objects that some people are very fond of and which I am not so fond of. It is that one should not be so interested in what people originally thought and said and felt about their objects, but be more interested in the relationship between our time spectators, we spectating this, the artist and the objects. I'm not saying that's uninteresting, but that's not really the priority that I would highlight in the mediation<sup>211</sup>.

There is a consensus between the two museums that there is a need to develop and implement methods for working with their collections intangible cultural heritage at the museums, but it is much beyond their reach and control. Or as the former Asia curator expressed it;

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<sup>208</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>209</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>210</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

<sup>211</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

The museums are very good at cannibalizing on others' knowledge. You just have to know that and that's what makes me a bit worried for the future since there are so few of us left here, there aren't so many cannibals left, and a museum must know what they say, and the information on the notes should be correct. Moreover, a museum should know much more than what on those notes<sup>212</sup>.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of my thesis was to research how Röhsska museum in Gothenburg and the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm worked according to the UNESCO Convention (2003) and ICOM guidelines and whether these were followed when it came to the preservation of their Japanese collections ICH. My thesis contributes to highlight the problems that are in these museums today when it comes to safeguarding their collections' ICH, and especially when both museums face financial cuts which result in research, documentation and staff being cut.

By examining the two museums Japanese exhibitions, archives, databases, catalogue cards, and interviews with the respective concerned curators I got the material that showed how these museums worked with the safeguarding of their Japanese collection ICH and whether these were in adherence with UNESCO Convention (2003) and ICOMs guidelines.

Despite that ICOM and UNESCO have acknowledged the part museums should play in safeguarding ICH this has proven to be more complicated in practice. Even though UNESCO assembled an expert meeting for putting the convention into practice and to cooperate efficiently with ICOM this has not had a major impact on how Röhsska or the Ethnographic museum works. Neither of the museums works consistently or strategically, nor do they have any references to the convention in their policy documents. A conclusion that could be drawn is that this is due to the fact that neither of the museums is actively involved and sits outside the frame of UNESCO and ICOM, which have led them to create their own policies. Arguably this would have looked different if they had adhered to the convention and guidelines.

My enquiry has showed that only the Ethnographic museum explores ways in which living heritage can be related to existing collections in connection to their Tea house. As, this is without any regard to what the UNESCO Convention says, it seems that the museum operates somewhat in compliance with the convention but without actually knowing it. A reason could be because the convention is linked to activities that correlate poorly to the museums core mission statement, or simply because that policies are created without full consideration of the many policies and conventions that govern museum ethics and activity.

The implementation of these guidelines could undeniably change how museums previously have worked with their collections ICH. But neither of the museums is working according to the ICOM guidelines seeing that the guidelines strive to respond to the continued training of the museum staff through combination of informal and formal instructional formats such as study tours, short-term training and supervised internships etc. Although Sweden ratified the UNESCO Convention 2011 and the Department of Language and Folklore laid the foundation for compromise the thematic main areas included in the convention, which could contribute to the improvement in museum work, it seems far away due to, amongst other, the museums financial struggles and other prioritization. Neither Röhsska nor the Ethnographic museums have resources to send staff to networks which are a core part of working, for example, with living ICH. A common problem that these museums share is when their curators leave their institution, their network and knowledge disappears along with them and they are not replaced. This depletes the museums' resources necessary to work with the safeguarding of ICH.

Japanese culture has a complex symbolic system embedded in their objects everyday lives. Within this we can find, for example history, art and philosophy which emerged from Japans different strands. All of these form a 'web of significance', and here museums play an important part when deciding to create an exhibition in relation to their Japanese collections with themes like "Tea ceremony", "Metal

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<sup>212</sup> The former Asia curator; the Ethnographic museum in Stockholm. 2015. Interview. February 17

art” and “Nô masks”. It is important to have a deep- rooted understanding and knowledge about what the objects signify. Without these you can’t create levels of meanings so the exhibition can be readable in different ways, which is one way to preserve their ICH and also an important step towards safeguarding it. Depending on how the museum chooses to display the objects in an exhibition, it undoubtedly affects the visitor interpretation and understanding. Different tools for interpretation such as labels, documents, educational activities, catalogues and other material inevitably influence how we perceive the objects. When building an exhibition, as in Röhsska museums case, with little knowledge of their Japanese objects there is a risk that the exhibition turns out vacuous and without substance. Greater knowledge of these objects would have highlighted different inputs for design and creation which would not only strengthen their exhibition but also to give the objects the significance and educational value that they need.

There is a desire in both museums to work more with their collections ICH and since the UNESCO Convention already has been ratified in Sweden the Conventions should be followed. But in practice this has not worked well. For this to be followed in practice, methods must be developed and a willingness of higher government agency to acknowledge the importance to work toward it. These methods should then function as a foundation for care plans and decisions regarding safeguarding of their collections ICH.

## 7. SUMMARY

This thesis purpose was to research how two museums with different approaches, Röhsska museum in Gothenburg that has a design approach and the Ethnographic Museums in Stockholm, worked with their Japanese collection intangible cultural heritage and if they worked in accordance to the UNESCO Convention for *Safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage* (2003) and ICOMs *Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development*.

The main research objectives were:

- \* to examine the knowledge and awareness of the UNESCOs Convention of Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) in Röhsska museum and the Ethnographical museum in Stockholm and assess how consistent their practice is with the guidelines of ICOM and the Convention.
- \* to assess which intangible values from the conventions' five key areas are taken into account in two museums
- \* to explore the intangible qualities of Japanese objects within western museum collections through critically analyzing literature associated with main belief system in Japanese cultural traditions
- \* to assess the level of knowledge about the Japanese objects the selected museums have chosen to exhibit, through analyzing archives, databases, exhibition and to identify if there are personnel with particular knowledge of Japanese cultural heritage
- \* and if the museums have any educational programs/ collaborations with other museums bodies in Japan
- \* to assess if there is a need to develop methods to better and more effectively work with preservation of the Japanese intangible cultural heritage in the selected museums?

As a part to answer my objectives I looked at Japanese objects as symbols that are part of a wider context whose culture has a complex system of different classifications that only can be understood through social interactions. With help from Geertz's theory "*thick description*" that specifies details, conceptual structures and meaning I approached symbolism.

The notion of "*thick description*" is to have a deep-rooted understanding for semiotics (symbols and meaning). But where Geertz's theory required field studies in the objects country of origin I focused on museums' relationships, collaborations and research, and other data for the interpretation of the Japanese objects. In regards to the field of anthropology and their commitment in the study of human cultural diversity these theoretical approaches support this enquiry in how to interpret and understand the Japanese collections symbolical meanings.

To allow a comparative approach I chose three similar exhibition parts (Nô mask, Metal art and Tea ceremony) in Röhsska- and the Ethnographic Museum to analyze the level of knowledge there is about these exhibited objects through analyzing archives, databases and exhibition. I explored whether there were any any educational activity related to these exhibitions and personnel with knowledge of Japanese cultural heritage.

This enquiry has largely been a comparative study between literature reviews and interviews with curators at Röhsska-, the Ethnographical museum and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities. The literature reviews summaries and interprets the conventions on the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO (2003) and ICOM and their guidelines. These provided with a comprehensive theoretical background on why museums act as they do and how they aspire to work with changes that go from being object fixed to person-oriented.

My results showed that both museums are members of ICOM and aware of UNESCO Convention of safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, but it became evident that neither of them worked in accordance to UNESCO or ICOM guidelines. None of the museums have any quotes in their policy documents of the Convention or guidelines, both write their own steering documents. The exhibition curators for Röhsska museum explained that their museum is not a museum of cultural history but an art museum and therefore works differently with their collections, while the Ethnographic museums former Asia curator explained that even though they write their own policy documents they try to work out their own opportunities and righteousness. But even so, there are not many curators left working in their government agency and the ones left are heavily overburden which affects the quality of their work.

When it comes to what five key domain that are taken into account in respective museums it became clear that none of the museums made their Japanese exhibition with the conventions five key areas in mind. The Exhibition curator explained that they see their collection from an aesthetic expression related to manufacturing and materials and emphasize that for them are the history of collection more important than how the objects once appeared in its authentic environment in Japan. The former Asia curator on the other hand explained that their government agency has not been so good at collecting intangible cultural heritage but more of the tangible kind. When they built their exhibition he wanted to play with the ambiguity of the image of Japan that is the mental image of Japan and photographs. None the less both have some aspect each of the convention five key domains. Röhsska museum contextualized the objects based on an aesthetical eye and interested in how the objects were made, what material, function and technology they had. In the UNESCO Convention article 2.2. (e) *Traditional craftsmanship* are mainly concerned with in particular knowledge and skills involve in the process of craftsmanship. Röhsska museum assume from the objects, but still has an intangible aspect present in their exhibition in terms of how the objects are made that sums up the knowledge and skill that is a part of safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The Ethnographic museums Japanese exhibition on the other hand put emphasis on usage, meanings, symbolic drama and humans and in the UNESCO Convention article 2.2 (b), for example, theatre is mentioned as one intangible aspect, In the Ethnographic museums Japanese exhibition they have focused on research, archives and documentation that can be seen as a way of both safeguard and convey Nô drama for visitors.

There is a difference when it comes to the knowledge stored in Röhsska- and the Ethnographic museums Japanese collections. The similarities are that neither of the museums have any collaborations with any museum bodies in Japan. Both have/ had educational activities in connection to their exhibition though it's more expressed in the Ethnographic museum since they operate a Tea house not far from the museum and in collaboration with a Tea association and Röhsska museums don't. Both have published books based in their respective Japanese collection and neither has any experts specifically working in their institutions. When it comes to their databases there are much more information to retrieve from the Ethnographic museum since they have their exhibition text inserted in their databases and Röhsska museum don't have much information about their objects.

Both museums reckons that there is a need to develop and implement working methods to safeguard their collections intangible cultural heritage, but that are a financial problem in their institutions that doesn't allow this kind of work.

Even though Sweden ratified the UNESCO Convention for *Safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage* (2003) in 2011, this has not worked well in practice. Methods must be developed and function as a foundation for care plans and decisions regarding safeguarding of museum collections intangible cultural heritage.



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All pictures in this thesis is taken by the author

### **Informants**

Exhibition curator at Röhsska museum, March 19, 2015

Japanese curator at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, February 17, 2015

Retired Asia curator at Ethnographical Museum in Stockholm, February 17, 2015

# APPENDIX 1

## Questionnaire

\*Is your museum member of ICOM?

\*Is your museum aware of the UNESCO Convention for safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (2003) and ICOM guidelines (ICOM Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development) for how they want museums to work more with the intangible cultural heritage?

-How is this awareness manifest in the museum?

-Who is aware?

-Is it a part of staff introduction or training?

-Is it any quotes in any policy documents?

\*Does your museum follow the guidelines issued by ICOM and how well is these guidelines consistent to the museum?

-Is there any documents?

\*Which intangible aspect does your museum take into account in relation to the UNESCO convention (2003) aspiration?

-In relation to collection, education and interpretation

\*What knowledge is there about the Japanese collection in the museum (archive, personnel, database and other?

-Are there experts?

-Is there research?

\*Did/ does your museum use/used Japanese exhibition in any (public) educational activity?

\*How does your museum use their Japanese collections in education/ research?

\*Does the museum have any collaboration / knowledge sharing with other museum bodies in Japan and how do this collaboration/ knowledge sharing look like?

\*Do you feel that there is a need to develop the preservation work of the Japanese collections more intangible values at the museum?

### **The interviewees were;**

-Retired Asia curator at the Ethnographical Museum in Stockholm, February 17- 2015

-Japanese curator at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, February 17- 2015

-Exhibition curator at Röhsska Museum in Gothenburg, March 19- 2015

## APPENDIX 2

The Ethnographic museums exhibition text about Nô theatre and Nô masks, Samurais and bushidô, and Tea ceremony. Retrieved from their database Carlotta May, 19, 2015

### Nô theatre

Japan boasts a long and rich theatrical tradition. One of the oldest forms still presented, nô, can be traced to the fourteenth century. The teams performing nô dramas were supported by the important families of the country. Accordingly, nô was to become a part of the refined culture of the leading classes. During the Edo period (1600–1868) the art of performing nô attained the strictly regulated structure known today. A nô theatre is traditionally found adjacent to a temple. The dramas transmit Buddhist ethics. Nô dramas are performed on a small stage (butai). The actors are men, who also perform female characters. First of all three to four musicians (hayashi) enter the stage, with drums and a flute. They are followed by a choir (jiutai), consisting of six or eight men, who in a poetic language and with great seriousness convey the substance of the play and the thoughts of the characters. Preceding the appearance of the main character (shite), the supporting character (waki) has already entered the stage. His character is more often than not a priest. The interaction between the two gives the drama its nerve. Less significant roles are played by accompanying actors (tsuge) or by child actors (kokata). The actors, in particular the shite, are dressed in sumptuous robes of silk and brocade. The shite and his supporting actors wear masks indicating the roles played. The others present on stage assume stiff faces, void of expression. The dramas take place among the living, the dead or the gods narrating stories drawn from actual history or religious myths. Movements and the handling of props (kodôgu), such as a fan, indicate the progress of the drama and the emotions that reign. In the intervals between the acts of the nô dramas the serious mood is temporarily broken when kyôgen actors, often wearing special masks, take over. Acting in a burlesque way, using everyday language, they communicate the contents of the drama in a direct way<sup>213</sup>.

### Nô masks and Nô costumes

Nô dramas offer strong visual experiences, not least through the masks and costumes worn by the actors. The masks may be divided into six groups: the "unique ones" which are connected to special plays (tokushu); demons and gods (kijin); old men (jô); boys and young men (otoko); women and girls (onna); and ghost/spirits (ryô). They are carved out of wood, which is painted with appropriate colours and lacquered. Sometimes hair is attached. The characters they depict have their distinguishing forms and expressions. Many master carvers are well known and revered. Masks with their brands can still be used many hundred years after they were carved. The costumes are usually sumptuous, created out of exquisite silk and brocade, exhibiting detailed patterns in beautiful natural colours. They are called karaori, "Chinese weave", and their origin is found in the costumes once imported exclusively for the leading families in the country, who could then donate them to nô companies. Few old costumes have survived the ravages of time. Fortunately, there are masters today who can recreate them<sup>214</sup>.

### Samurais The way of the warrior (bushidô)

Japan, as we know it from the Edo period (1600-1868), was a strictly divided society in which a person was born into one of several classes. Every citizen occupied a position and fulfilled an occupation that was even laid down by law. On top came the warring nobility, the samurais. At the bottom of the scale were the traders and in between came peasants and craftsmen. The samurais, as a warring elite, are attested in history back to the early tenth century. Thereafter they played an ever more dominant role in Japanese history, until the Restoration of 1868 when they officially lost their privileged position. Then the emperor was reinstated as the formal ruler of the country. For almost a millennium his dynasty, with its divine origin, had mostly played a ceremonial role, while real power had been vested with the samurais. This class was not a homogeneous one. It consisted of families/clans that from time to time fought with or against one another, who could be close to or far removed from power and wealth. Men from their ranks formed the political order we know as the shogunate. From 1192 to 1868, during three shogunates, Japan was ruled by military regents wielding absolute power. Below them was a society of a feudal type characterised by mutual dependencies between master and vassal. Basically it was built to serve military purposes. Foot soldiers, mounted troops and commanders could be quickly mobilised. The samurais were never far removed from their weapons. The samurais developed a culture of their own, making them easy to recognize and marking their exclusive position. They had to care for their appearance, cultivate their minds and acquire various skills. Based on a Buddhist ethic, they developed what was to be known as "the way of the warrior" (bushidô), a path they were expected to follow. They were to be well-groomed and dressed, faithful and brave even when confronting death. They were to assign great value to honour, be respectful in front

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<sup>213</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505958>

<sup>214</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505958>

of superiors and show compassion to others. A samurai had to know the classics and be familiar with tea ceremonies. He was supposed to practice calligraphy and know how to compose poetry. From an early age he was trained to handle a sword, a bow and a lance, and to master a horse while engaged in battle<sup>215</sup>.

### **The Samurai - His armour and swords**

The Samurai was expected to be constantly prepared for battle, and accordingly he was equipped for warfare. On the battlefield he wore body armour (ôyoroï) consisting of many parts, from the helmet and the mask via the parts protecting the body to the footwear. Its form and its materials developed over the centuries, not only to provide better protection and mobility but also to impress and fright. The armour was the joint result of many master craftsmen. Foremost among those who armed the Samurai was undeniably the smith. He forged blades (toshin) of unsurpassed quality and beauty. Then other craftsmen with their contributions turned the sword into a veritable work of art, with a decorated sword guard (tsuba), hilt (tsuka), sheath (saya), and braided cord (sageo). Together they supplied the samurai the weapons he regarded as “his soul”: his long sword (katana) and his short sword (wakazashi)<sup>216</sup>.

### **Tea ceremonies and the way of the tea (chadô)**

Tea was introduced from China in the eighth century. It was a part of the rapid advances made by Buddhism in Japan. Thus, in the beginning tea was primarily consumed in the environment provided by a temple. Tea was considered to contain healing properties. Interest in tea, however, waned over the next few centuries. Towards the end of the twelfth century the Zen Buddhist monk Eisai returned from studies in China. He is famous for having reintroduced the custom of ceremonially drinking tea. History tells us that he turned to Minamoto Yoritomomo, founder of the first shogunate. Thus, tea ceremonies as well as Zen Buddhism gained support among the samurais. The kind of tea associated with tea ceremonies is a green dust tea (matcha), which is carefully stirred in hot water. Accordingly, the resultant tea also contains the finely pounded leaves, and is rich in stimulating substances. The monks consumed it while meditating to avoid falling asleep. The samurais used it primarily as a drink for social occasions. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the tea ceremony underwent further developments. It became increasingly conventionalised and aesthetic. The consumption of tea became closely associated with formal social intercourse. In 1568 Odo Nobunaga, one of the great warlords of his time, appointed three merchants to be his tea masters. One of them was Sen no Rikyô. As a practitioner of Zen he aspired to imbue the ceremony with simplicity and reserve. It was to be based on harmony (wa) between people, nature and the material world, respect (kei) for people and objects, and bodily as well as spiritual purity (sei). Together this would result in the peace of mind and tranquillity aimed at during the ceremony. Over time, however, absolute simplicity was complemented by an ambition to turn the ceremony into a composite work of art. The inner and outer architecture of the teahouse gained importance, as well as its surrounding garden. Patterns of movement during the ceremony became fixed. Tea bowls and other objects were to be rightly admired for their beauty<sup>217</sup>.

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<sup>215</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505959>

<sup>216</sup> <http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1505959>

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